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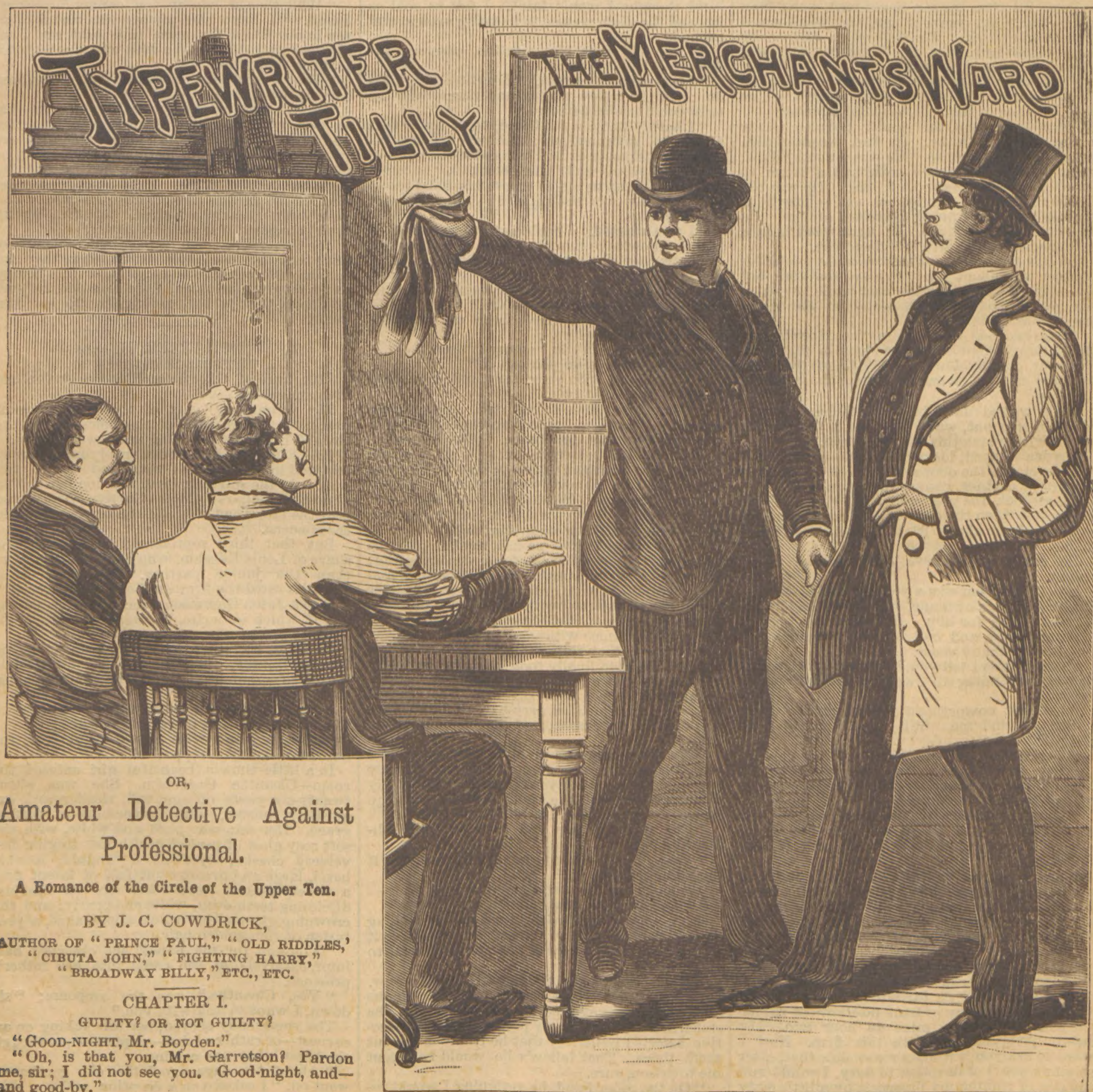
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OR,
Amateur Detective Against Professional.

A Romance of the Circle of the Upper Ten.

BY J. C. COWDRICK,
AUTHOR OF "PRINCE PAUL," "OLD RIDDLES,"
"CIBUTA JOHN," "FIGHTING HARRY,"
"BROADWAY BILLY," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

GUILTY? OR NOT GUILTY?

"GOOD-NIGHT, Mr. Boyden."

"Oh, is that you, Mr. Garretson? Pardon me, sir; I did not see you. Good-night, and—good-by."

"Good-by— What do you mean? Why, you are as pale as a ghost! What has happened?"

"THE PROOF," SAID THE DETECTIVE, "IS HERE," AND STEPPING UP TO ME HE DREW FROM MY OVERCOAT POCKET SEVERAL PAIRS OF SILK STOCKINGS.

"I have been branded a thief and forced to resign."

"A thief!—resign!—you?"

The exclamations were uttered with all the force of genuine surprise.

It was late in the afternoon of a pleasant winter day, and the great wholesale store of Garretson, Ellisdon & Co. was about closing. The massive iron shutters were being run down into place, and the employees were departing, one by one.

The firm of Garretson, Ellisdon & Co. was one of the wealthiest in the city. They had several millions invested, and carried on a big business on a solid money basis.

At the head of the firm, now that Godard Ellisdon was dead, was Moses Garretson. He was about sixty years of age, and was considered an excellent man of business in his line. He had a kindly face, but his features did not indicate strength and decision to any very great degree.

Moses Garretson had been associated with Godard Ellisdon for many years—in fact they had started business together on a modest scale, and together they had pushed it forward to its present magnitude.

Two years previous to the time of our story Godard Ellisdon died, and Moses Garretson then became the head of the house, Ellisdon's son stepping into his place.

Louis Ellisdon, the son mentioned, was a man about thirty-five years of age, tall, well-formed and good-looking. He was quite dark, with very black hair, eyes and mustache, and was always faultlessly dressed.

Previous to his father's death he had been the junior partner of the firm, which post was now held by a son of the present senior member.

Jason Garretson, this junior partner, was a young man of thirty. He had recently been taken into the business. He was a noble fellow, not a bit afraid of hard work, and a friend to everybody who deserved a friend. He was not above the medium height, but was solidly built and had the physique of a trained athlete. He was of the blonde type, had light wavy hair, a full mustache, and eyes of a deep blue.

On this afternoon of which we write the junior partner was about ready to leave the store, but had stepped aside from the door while he put on his gloves, and was idly watching the others pass out as he did so.

While he stood thus he observed Howell Boyden, a department superintendent in the establishment, coming down the middle of the store, his eyes cast down and he taking no notice of any one.

Jason waited until he was at the door and ready to step out, when he spoke to him in the words with which this chapter opens.

Boyden stopped, looked up, and seeing who it was he closed the door and put out his hand to the junior partner, responding as quoted.

Jason took the proffered hand with a warm grasp, but when the department superintendent spoke again he almost let it drop in his amazement.

He could not believe that he had heard aright.

Howell Boyden was a young man about the junior partner's own age, and Jason had taken a great liking for him. He was a smart, good-looking fellow, and had been in the employ of the firm for many years.

"It is just as I tell you," Boyden quietly confirmed, responding to Jason's exclamations of surprise.

"I cannot comprehend it," the junior cried. "You astound me. Who has forced you to resign?"

"Your father and Mr. Ellisdon."

"But, on what grounds do they accuse you? I have heard nothing of this. There is some serious mistake, of course."

"If you are ready for the street, sir, we will go out, and I will tell you about it as we go along. I must get out into the air, or I believe I shall faint."

"Yes, I am ready; come on. You look like a corpse. Whatever this mistake is, Howell, it shall be set right and you shall be reinstated."

"I do not know about that. But before I tell you about it, let me ask you one question."

"Go ahead."

"I have been in the employ of Garretson, Ellisdon & Co. eighteen years—ever since I was twelve years old. By faithful attention to my work I gained my present position—or rather the position that was mine an hour ago. My future prospects lay with this firm. Now I want to ask you if it looks reasonable that, after so many years of devotion to duty, I would run the risk of ruining my prospects by a little petty stealing?"

"No, positively," was the firm response.

"And you are willing to believe me when I say that I am innocent of the mean crime with which I am charged?"

"I am. But on what grounds are you accused? What is the charge?"

"I will tell you. For some time past petty thieving has been going on in my department. I have done my best to discover the guilty one, but so far without success. The stealing has never amounted to much at a time, but has been very annoying. I reported it some time ago to your father and Mr. Ellisdon, and since then our detectives have had their eyes on the employees of my department."

"This afternoon, just as we were closing and I had put on my overcoat, an office-boy came to me and said that Mr. Garretson wanted to see me in the office at once."

"Of course I obeyed the summons immediately, and when I entered the office I found your father and Mr. Ellisdon and a detective there. I thought at once that some discovery had been made, but was not prepared for what followed."

"'Boydon,' said your father, 'this man makes a serious charge against you which we hope you can disprove. You are charged with being the thief that has been at work in your department for so long.'"

"I thought I would faint. I felt as cold as ice, and the room seemed to be going around and around."

"You will note his agitation," observed the detective.

"It is certainly great," commented Mr. Ellisdon; adding: "Now we can understand why the thief could not be detected."

"I hardly know what I said, but I know that I protested my innocence; and, when I had become a little more calm, I demanded their proof."

"The proof," said the detective, "is here; and stepping up to me he thrust his hand into a pocket of my overcoat and drew out six pairs of silk stockings."

"I was amazed. I could not utter a word. I had no knowledge that they were in my pocket, and how they came there is a mystery. But, Jason Garretson, I will swear by all I hold sacred in this world and in the world to come, that I am as innocent as you are."

The words could not have been uttered with more sincere earnestness.

"I believe you, fully," assured Jason.

"I am glad to hear you say it."

"Well, go on with your story, and let me hear it all."

"There is but little more to tell. Your father asked me what I had to say, and in reply I could only protest my innocence. The detective averred positively that he had seen me take the articles and put them in my pocket during the afternoon, at a moment when I thought no one was watching me. But he lied!—as Heaven is my witness, he uttered a black and monstrous lie, villain that I now know him to be!"

"Your father looked pained, and said that he had hoped better things of me; declaring that the proof was too positive to be doubted, and that he would have to order my arrest. I believe I could have reasoned with him had it not been for the presence of Mr. Ellisdon. You know he has great influence with your father."

"I believe they fully intended to arrest me, but Mr. Ellisdon finally took a more charitable view of the matter. He suggested that, in view of my long service with the firm, I be allowed to resign, inasmuch as arrest would be the sure precursor of conviction, and that would ruin me forever."

"Mr. Garretson fell in with that view, and requested me to resign immediately and take my leave; but being wholly innocent I refused flatly to do anything of the kind. I told them to go on and arrest me, and I would stand trial."

"But still you say you have resigned," observed Jason.

"Yes; for on second thought I considered it the wiser thing to do."

"It looks bad for you, though."

"Then you, too, doubt me?"

"Oh, no, not so, Howell; I am merely looking on the practical side of the matter. I believe it would have been better to have allowed them to arrest you."

"Well, perhaps you are right; I do not know. I had to decide immediately, one way or the other. The case against me was powerful. The stolen articles were in my pockets, and the detective asserted positively that he had seen me put them there. That fellow's lie would have sent me to prison, sure."

"On the other hand, by resigning I would retain my liberty, and could work to establish my

innocence. Failing in that, I might stand a chance of getting another situation somewhere; for your father and Mr. Ellisdon, more kind than I could expect under such circumstances, have promised not to let the reason for my sudden action become known. You know that a term in prison would mean ruin forever."

"Yes, I see; and now that I look at the matter in that light, I believe you have done the best thing you could do."

"I sat down and wrote my resignation in few words, received a check for my salary to date, and it was done. In the eyes of your father and Mr. Ellisdon, I am a thief, but that detective knows that I am innocent, and he shall answer to me for the lie he has spoken against me."

Both were silent for some time.

"It is plain that you have an enemy in the store," the junior presently observed.

"Yes, agreed the other, "and my enemy is that detective; though why he is my enemy I do not know."

"Do you suspect no one else?"

"No; whom else can I suspect?"

"I thought perhaps your mind would turn upon some one else, some one who might have an object in getting you into trouble."

Howell Boyden was thoughtful.

"No, I can think of no one," he finally said.

"Well, then, I can if you cannot," asserted Jason. "I have had my eye on a certain person in our store for some time past, and I am almost sure that he is the man who has laid this plot for your ruin."

"Who is he?" the disgraced superintendent eagerly demanded.

"I will not tell you now, Howell," was the answer, "but I will set to work upon this case, and if I find that my suspicion is right, there will be a circus in our camp, and you shall be restored to your position. Do not do anything rash, but depend on me. Keep quiet for a time, and let me handle this matter for you. You have been greatly wronged, but that wrong shall be righted if it is in my power."

The two young men walked on in company until they came to a corner where they had to take different directions; then, with a hearty and reassuring pressure of the hand on the part of Jason, they parted, each going to his own home.

CHAPTER II.

A DIFFERENCE OF OPINION.

THE firm of Garretson, Ellisdon & Co. had many members.

The "Company" part of the concern meant much. It meant many of the heirs of the late Godard Ellisdon, and their name was Legion.

The Ellisdons had considerably more money invested in the business than had the Garretsons. At the start, Godard Ellisdon had put in almost ten dollars to Moses Garretson's one, and now the latter had only about a third interest in the concern.

But that third represented more than the share of Louis Ellisdon, who had but little more than the junior partner. The commercial agencies rated the firm at about six millions.

When Jason Garretson reached home, on the day of which we write, he went at once to his room to prepare for dinner.

While he was there, his father came in, going into the library, where he touched an electric button to summon a servant, who soon responded to the call.

"If Miss Garretson is in, tell her that I desire to see her here," the merchant directed.

"Yes, sir;" and with a respectful bow, the domestic silently disappeared.

In a little time a beautiful girl entered the room—Cleanthe Garretson. She was about twenty-six years of age, tall, slender and exquisitely molded, with movements of perfect grace. Her skin was pure and white, with the soft rosy glow of perfect health just tinging her velvety cheeks; eyes of a languid, lovable hazel, large and dreamy but full of latent fire; a sweet, kissable mouth, the ripe-red lips just disclosing teeth even, white and pearly; and, the crowning glory of her whole appearance, a profusion of rich golden hair.

"You sent for me, papa?" she observed half interrogatively, as she came into her father's presence.

"Yes, Cleanthe," was the response; "sit down, I want to talk with you."

The young lady obeyed, her face taking on an earnest—or rather a sober—expression, as though she knew what was coming.

"About ten days ago," the old gentleman went on, "I asked you a question, and you said you would give me a decided answer in one

week. That week has passed, and no answer yet. Surely you have had time enough to make up your mind."

"You refer to Mr. Ellisdon's suit, papa?"

"To be sure; what else would I refer to? He is pestering me for a decided answer, and I want to give it to him. I tell you, my daughter, he is a splendid man in every way, and you could not make a better match. He is handsome, educated, smart, rich—everything that you can desire."

"But I do not love him, papa."

"Pooh! what matters that? Marry him, honor and respect him, and my word for it the love part will come fast enough."

"It is your wish that I marry him, then, papa?"

"It is. Why, he has a heart as big and strong as a lion's, and yet as gentle as a dove's. He is magnanimous to a marked degree. Here is an incident that occurred this very day, to give you a for-instance: For some time past a thief has been at work in our store, pilfering a little now and a little again. To-day one of the detectives caught him dead to rights and arrested him. He had stolen articles to the value of fifty dollars in his pocket, which the detective had seen him take and put there. You see there was no chance for the fellow; the proof was positive. I was for having him arrested, but Ellisdon led me to change my mind. The fellow had been with us for some time, and to send him to prison would blight his life forever. On the other hand, to allow him to resign quietly would cover his fault to a certain extent, and he would have a square chance to reform. That was Ellisdon's idea, and we let him off with a reprimand and some solid advice. I tell you he is a noble fellow!"

"That was generous, certainly," Cleanthe commented. "It is more than I would have expected of him."

"My child, you are foolishly prejudiced against him. You will not allow yourself to see how good and noble he is. But, your answer: what is it?"

"You really advise me to marry him, do you, papa?"

"Of course I do. To refuse, would be to throw away the chance of your life. Why, he— But, there, I will not say another word. What do you say?"

"Well, papa, since you so much desire it and advise me to do so, I will marry him. I—"

"Ha! Good! I thought you would—"

"Pardon me, papa, but hear me out."

"Well, go on."

"I was about to add that I do not love him, and he must understand it so. I marry him only because it is your wish. I shall strive to be a true and devoted wife none the less, and—"

"There, there, now, don't be so foolish as to cry over it; you will be the happiest little woman in all the land, and an object of envy to all your sex."

Mr. Garretson took his daughter in his arms and imprinted a kiss upon her forehead, after which he allowed her to go from the room.

As soon as the door closed after her, he smiled and rubbed his hands.

"What an obstinate and perverse creature woman is, even the best specimen of her," he commented. "Here that girl has been standing in her own light, and I have had to force her, almost, to accept an offer that she ought to have been glad to jump at. On the other hand, if she had taken a fancy to some worthless scamp, she would have been just as stubborn in that direction. Ah, me, it is a queer world, and there is no accounting for the whims of women."

An hour later the family were assembled at dinner. No one outside of the family was present, and choosing a time when no servant was in the room, Mr. Garretson said:

"I do not believe in secrets in a family. How many of you agree with me in this?"

As he spoke he looked toward Cleanthe, and the warm blood mounted to her face in a moment. Mrs. Garretson, too, looked in her direction with an amused smile. The others could only wonder what was coming.

"We have a secret in our family," Mr. Garretson went on. "The firm of Garretson, Ellisdon & Co. is soon to become more closely united than ever. My sons and daughters, your sister Cleanthe has promised to become the wife of Mr. Louis Ellisdon."

The younger brothers and sisters of the prospective bride greeted the announcement with exclamations; but, not so Jason.

Half suspecting what was coming, he bent the lower over his plate, and when the truth

came out he felt himself turning pale and red by turns. He was not noticed, however, for while the girls were chattering away at high pressure he had plenty of time to recover himself.

For some time Jason Garretson had had an eye suspicion upon Louis Ellisdon, and he believed of that the latter was not all that he pretended to be. When he learned of Howell Boyden's trouble, his mind instantly turned upon Ellisdon with the thought that he was in some way concerned in it.

But he disliked and mistrusted him from the first, and knowing that his suspicions might be only the outcome of his personal prejudice, having no foundation whatever in fact, he meant to move slow in the matter. It would never do for him to hint at the suspicion he had, without some proof to back it, so he would have to keep the thought to himself, and shadow his man for the time being.

When the excitement occasioned by the announcement made by Mr. Garretson had in a measure subsided, and the conversation flagged a little, Jason turned to his father and asked:

"What do you think of that peculiar case of this afternoon, father?"

"What do you refer to?" Mr. Garretson asked.

"Why, to the charge made against—"

"Oh! I see. Why, I think it was a plain case. The fellow was caught right in the act, and the stolen articles were found on his person."

"Then you put no confidence in his word? He strongly declares that he is innocent of the theft."

"Why, Jason, how could I put any confidence in what he said? It was a plain case, and only for Mr. Ellisdon it would have gone hard with him. On his suggestion we let him off very easy, indeed. And, between you and me, he seemed glad of the chance to get off so lightly. I tell you Ellisdon has a big heart!"

Jason shut his teeth down hard over that, to keep his thought from framing itself into words.

"What do you think of it?" Mr. Garretson asked in turn.

"I hardly dare express my belief, in the face of your conviction and the positive proof presented."

"Ha! then you do not agree with us, eh?"

"I do not."

"Well, what is your opinion in regard to the case?"

"I believe that Howell Boyden is an innocent man."

"Howell Boyden?"

It was Cleanthe Garretson who uttered the exclamation.

All eyes were turned upon her, and she was seen to have suddenly become pale. And, seeing that she had drawn attention to herself, she became somewhat confused.

"I—I—This is a great surprise," she falteringly said. "You did not tell me who it was when you told me about the case, papa. Mr. Boyden is the last person in the world whom I would have suspected."

"He is the very last person in the world that any one would have suspected," supported Jason.

"But, the proof—the proof," Mr. Garretson insisted; "how are you going to get around the proof?"

"I do not pretend to get around it," responded Jason, "but I believe that there is some mistake at the bottom of it all."

"That casts a reflection upon the detective, my boy."

"Father, you will bear with me if I speak plainly, I am sure."

"Speak right out, Jason."

"Well, let me ask you one or two questions. First, how long has that detective been in your employ?"

"About two years, I guess; perhaps a little longer."

"Very well. Second, how long has Howell Boyden been with the house?"

The millionaire merchant's face flushed a little.

"I believe it is something like eighteen years," he answered.

"And yet you take the word of the detective before—"

"Hold on, Jason; you don't seem to understand. Mr. Krooge is a professional detective, and he would not be likely to make so serious a charge without being sure of his ground."

"Professional detective or not," retorted Jason, with a little more warmth, "he is only human, and is as likely to err as any of us. I believe there is a mistake somewhere. Why, father, Howell Boyden has been in your employ eighteen years, as you acknowledge. He has worked him-

self up from the lowest position to one of the highest. I cannot and will not believe that he would ruin his whole life's prospects by such utter folly as he is charged with! It is simply incredible."

CHAPTER III.

THE PROMISE OF MARRIAGE.

JASON GARRETSON had uttered his words with considerable vehemence, and the millionaire merchant felt the force of his argument.

"Can it be possible that there is some mistake?" he queried.

"It is not only possible, but decidedly positive," asserted Jason. "Why, I had almost as soon mistrust myself! If he had been inclined to steal he could have taken thousands of dollars in cash as easily as such petty trifles."

"But that would have meant detection. If inclined to steal, would he not be more likely to adopt the very plan that he did—that he seems to have taken?"

"Probably he would; but, you cannot make me believe that he is guilty."

"No, nor me," vowed Cleanthe, with decision.

"Well, it is possible that there is some mistake," Mr. Garretson admitted, "and perhaps the matter will bear further investigation. When I come to reflect how long the young man was in the employ of the firm, and how we have always regarded him, it certainly does look unreasonable. But, the proof—you see, Jason, the proof is so positive that it leaves no room for doubt."

"But there is room for a mistake, father."

"Well, I will speak to Ellisdon and the detective about it to-morrow, and—"

"I hope you will do nothing of the kind, father."

"What do you mean?"

"I want to investigate the matter a little myself, on the quiet."

"You!"

"Yes, I. If you will promise not to say anything whatever to Ellisdon, or to the detective, I will undertake a little shadowing on my own account. In the mean time the case can stand just as it is."

"Very well, Jason, I agree to say nothing. Go ahead, and I honestly hope that you will succeed in establishing the young man's innocence."

"I have given him my word that I will do so if it is in my power."

"Good! Set to work, my boy, and if I can do anything to help you, let me know. You have raised a serious doubt in my mind, though I really am not able to see where there is room for doubt in the face of evidence so positive."

There the matter rested for the time being, and the subject was dropped.

It was about an hour after dinner, and Jason Garretson was seated in his room enjoying his after-dinner cigar, when there came a light knock at his door.

"Who is there?" he asked.

"It is I—Cleanthe," was the response; "may I come in?"

"Yes, come right in," Jason invited.

The door swung open and the beautiful girl stepped into the room.

"I thought I should find you here," she observed; "I want to have a little talk with you."

She drew up a stool and sat down near him.

"I am glad you have come up, sis," Jason declared.

"Why?" she asked.

"Because, like you, I want to talk. Not that I have much to say, however, but I want to ask one question."

"And what is that?"

"Have you really promised to marry Louis Ellisdon? Of course there is no need to ask, but still I want to have it from your own lips."

"It is true, Jason; I have promised father to become Louis Ellisdon's wife."

The words were spoken in neither a proud nor a happy tone. In fact, the tone and manner were rather the reverse. Jason's face wore a clouded expression.

"You do not congratulate me, as the others have done," Cleanthe observed, after a momentary spell of silence.

"I cannot do so without playing the hypocrite," Jason frankly declared.

"You do not approve of it, then?"

"To be honest with you, sis, I am not in favor of your choice at all."

"Oh, but he is not my choice, Jason; papa and mamma have chosen him for me. I have promised to marry him simply because they have urged me to do so."

"Is that so, sis?"

"Yes; I do not love him as I feel I ought, and

I have told him so. Papa and mamma laugh at that, though, and tell me that I will learn to love him all in good time, so I suppose it will be all right."

"I cannot say that I agree with them."

"Of course I do not dislike him, you understand, Jason; but I have no more than a friendly feeling for him. Did I dislike him, then no power on earth could make me marry him. But, you say you are not in favor of the match; what is your objection to Mr. Ellisdon?"

"It is a personal objection, pure and simple," was the answer. "I do not like him, and do not believe I ever shall. In fact, I— But, that is the reason; I do not like him."

"Why do you dislike him? Come, if you know anything, you ought to tell me, Jason."

"That is just it, sis, I don't know anything. All that I can say is that I have taken a great dislike to him, and that I rather mistrust him. What I say to you I say in confidence. To come right out, I have been rather suspicious of him for some time past, and I do not believe that he is—well, worthy of your hand, to say the least; and really that may be called saying the most."

"And you cannot tell *why* you dislike and mistrust him?"

"Well, yes; and, no. You see, it has come about by a thousand and one little things, any one of which taken alone amount to nothing, but which, taken collectively, mean a good deal—at any rate, they do to my mind. But, you see it is mere personal prejudice, and it would never do for me to utter a word against the proposed match."

"I see and I understand; still, as papa would say, can you not give me a 'for-instance' of his objectionable side?"

"No, I do not believe I can. As I have said, any one of the many little things amounts to nothing, taken by itself. My antipathy is the outcome of the entire two years that I have been associated with him. But, enough said. I may, after all, be altogether wrong, so do not think too seriously of what I have said. Let us change the subject. What did you come up to talk with me about?"

"Yes, perhaps it is just as well to say no more," Cleanthe agreed. "The step has been taken, and I suppose there is no drawing back now. Why, I came up to ask you more about the charge that has been brought against Howell Boyden."

"I thought so," Jason quietly remarked.

"You thought so?" Cleanthe exclaimed.

"What gave you that impression?"

"Your sudden interest at the dinner-table when his name was spoken. I fancy that I can read a little private secret of yours, sister mine."

Cleanthe blushed.

"Is it not true that you have more than a passing interest in Howell Boyden?" Jason demanded.

"I do not know why I should have," the young lady evaded. "I simply know him as one of the employees at the store. He has been very courteous to me at different times, however, and I have thus come to know him better than any of the others there."

Cleanthe's manner was not wholly free from restraint, and Jason watched her with a half-amused smile.

"Your explanation is good, and I ought to say satisfactory, too, I suppose," he observed. "As to the case, if father has told you about it I do not see that I can add anything to it."

"But I would like to hear it all. I want the particulars, you see."

"Yes, I think I do see. Well, I will tell you all about it."

Jason went ahead and told her all there was to tell.

She listened attentively, not interrupting more than once or twice.

"And yet, in spite of such positive evidence," she observed, when he had finished his narration, "you believe him innocent."

"I certainly do," Jason assured.

"Then do you mean to go further and say that that detective has perjured himself?"

"No, I do not say that. That would be a serious charge. All I can say is that I believe there is a mistake somewhere."

"In what way can you imagine a mistake?"

"I hardly know. The detective may have seen some one put something into the pocket of Boyden's coat, and been mistaken in the person."

"But he says he is sure that it was Howell, as I understand it."

"Yes, that is so. Still, his eyes may have deceived him."

"But who would have any object in putting

anything into How— into Mr. Boyden's pocket?"

"Now you ask me too much. But, I intend to give attention to the matter, and I shall try to solve the mystery one way or the other. If I find that I cannot do it myself, then I intend to employ a good detective."

"I am glad to see you so determined, Jason. Go ahead, and prove him innocent if you can. Like you, I cannot bring myself to believe that he is guilty. He is far too noble, too manly, to stoop to anything so mean."

"And in short," Jason finished, "if he were only in Louis Ellisdon's boots, then the love part of the match would give you no trouble; isn't that it, sis?"

Cleanthe's face was burning red.

"You have no right to speak like that to me," she responded, "and I have less right to answer. But, I will say this: Even did I care for How—for Mr. Boyden, and he for me, marriage with him would be out of the question. Papa and mamma would never allow it, as you know. I am saying to you what I would not say to any one else. Please do not hint again as you have hinted now. My choice is made, and— Ah! there is a ring at the bell."

The door-bell had sounded, and now they heard the door open and close.

"Very well," agreed Jason, "I will mention it no more."

They talked on, but were interrupted by a rap at the door.

Cleanthe opened it, finding one of the domestics there.

"A caller for you, Miss Garretson," she announced.

"Who is it?" Cleanthe asked.

"It is Mr. Ellisdon."

"Very well."

Cleanthe closed the door for a moment and turned back to speak to Jason.

"This is papa's doings," she said. "He demanded my final answer this afternoon, and it has been arranged that Mr. Ellisdon should call."

Forcing a smile, then, the beautiful girl went out and closed the door.

Within the hour Louis Ellisdon had his answer, and was made happy. The evening was a joyous one, or seemed to be, and when Mr. Ellisdon went away he was in a happy mood.

CHAPTER IV.

TAKING UP THE TRAIL.

LOUIS ELLISDON was a happy man.

When he appeared at the business house next day he had a smile for everybody, and a cheery word for all.

Now he could afford to wear a smile and be agreeable. The fond dream of his life was all but realized. Soon pretty Cleanthe Garretson would be his wife.

For a long time he had been laying siege to her heart, fighting almost against hope, but at last the day was won—the citadel taken.

His courtship had been a determined one. Latterly he had vowed that he would win the object of his heart's devotion, no matter at what cost, and whether by fair means or means unfair.

But now it was all over, the victory was his, and he could rest upon his oars and wear the countenance of contentment.

When Mr. Garretson came down to business Mr. Ellisdon entered the office.

"Good-morning, Mr. Garretson," he greeted the senior partner.

"Good-morning, Louy," was the response; "how are you this morning?"

"I am the happiest man in the town!" Ellisdon exclaimed.

Mr. Garretson laughed.

"I am glad to hear you say so," he declared. "But, I know how it is," he added; "I was there myself once."

Other remarks followed, and presently Ellisdon observed.

"I have been thinking about Boyden, Mr. Garretson."

"Yes?"

"Yes."

"And what have you been thinking about him?"

Mr. Garretson showed interest in the matter immediately.

"I have been thinking that perhaps we have been too severe with him. Would it not have been just as well for us to have given him another chance here? Now that he has been caught, he has had a lesson, and perhaps if we restore him to his place he will appreciate our kindness and endeavor to repay us by better

conduct and increased fidelity to duty in the future."

"Louy, give me your hand!" the millionaire merchant exclaimed. "If ever man had a big heart in his breast, that man is yourself. I am proud of you, and I am glad that you are coming into my family as my son."

Mr. Garretson shook the hand of his partner warmly.

"Don't flatter me, Mr. Garretson," the younger man protested, "you will spoil me;" laughing. "Being happy myself, I want to make somebody else happy, too. But, you will find that I am not wholly disinterested in this matter."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean this: Where can we find a man to put in Boyden's place who can handle the business as he handled it? Even with his fault, I believe it is to our interest to reinstate him."

"I believe you are right, Ellisdon; but you cannot make me believe but that this is a mere secondary thought."

"Then you agree to put him back?"

"I do."

"Very well, please send for him and we will break the good news to him—for of course it will be good news."

"I will do so immediately."

"By the way, where is Jason this morning?" Ellisdon asked.

"I understood him to say that he might not be here to-day," Mr. Garretson answered.

Howell Boyden was sent for, and in about an hour he entered the office.

Mr. Garretson was there, and Ellisdon came in immediately.

Both offered their hands to the disgraced ex-superintendent, but he did not notice them. Instead, he remained standing near the door, holding his hat in his hand respectfully.

"You sent for me," he observed; "I am here. What do you want?"

"We have been thinking over our hasty action of yesterday," Mr. Garretson opened.

Boyden said nothing.

"To come right to the point," Ellisdon further explained, "we have come to the conclusion that, considering your long service with the house, we will give you another chance."

Still the young man was silent.

"That is it," finished Mr. Garretson; "we have decided to reinstate you in your old place, at the same salary, and you may resume your duties immediately. We are willing to overlook your fault, and no doubt this lesson will be a lasting one to you."

"Are you done, gentlemen?" Howell Boyden now asked.

"That is all," said Mr. Garretson.

"Then please hear what I have to say: The house of Garretson, Ellisdon & Co. has no room for a thief in its service, and until my innocence shall have been established I will not enter your service in any capacity whatever. Good-morning!"

He turned to go, but Mr. Garretson stopped him.

"Howell, hold on," he requested.

"Well?" and the young man stopped at the door.

"Are you not a little too hasty?"

"No, sir, I am not! I am innocent of the charge that has been made against me, and until my innocence is acknowledged, I shall not enter these doors again."

This was said politely but determinedly, and the young man opened the door and passed out.

Mr. Garretson and Louis Ellisdon gazed after him in amazement.

"It has not worked as we anticipated," Mr. Garretson observed. "He does not seem to look upon it as such good news as we thought he would."

"So it seems," responded Ellisdon. "I had no idea that he would refuse."

"Can it be that there is some mistake, do you think?" Mr. Garretson questioned seriously.

"I do not see how there can be," Ellisdon returned.

"Perhaps Krooge has been mistaken in the person he saw."

"He seemed too positive for any doubt."

"That is so. Well, I do not see how we can do any more than we have done, do you? Instead of having him arrested, we let him off easy, and now we have actually offered to take him back."

"And he has refused. No, I do not see that we can do anything further, and I do not feel that we are called upon to do anything now."

"Well, we will let the matter rest right where it is," Mr. Garretson concluded. "If anything turns up that points to his innocence,

we will investigate it. We can do nothing more."

So the matter was dropped, but in his heart Mr. Garretson secretly hoped that Jason would succeed in establishing the innocence of the young man, when he would be only too happy to take him back.

In the mean time what of the junior partner?

He had not been in the store that morning, but he had been as far as its doors, and in disguise.

Jason Garreston was beginning his detective experience in the time-honored manner. He had a man to shadow; his identity must not be known to him; hence the disguise.

He was clad in a close-fitting double-breasted coat of rough blue cloth, and had on a cap of the same material. It was the first time he had ever had on such an outfit, and he might possibly have passed into the store and out again without being recognized, even with no further attempt at concealment of identity. But in addition he wore a pair of big blue spectacles.

With these on, he could have gone right into the office and talked with his father with all the chances in favor of his not being known.

In fact, he had tested the disguise by accosting one of the employees of the house and inquiring the location of a certain street. The man had not recognized him, although Jason and he knew each other well.

The man the junior partner wanted to shadow was Gaston Kroogs, the detective who had given the damaging evidence against Howell Boyden.

Jason was out early, and was in the neighborhood of the store by the time it was opened.

Louis Ellisdon arrived only a short time later.

The latter passed right by Jason, but gave him no more than a casual glance.

It was some time after nine before the detective was seen, and Jason was beginning to fear that he was not coming to the store that morning, when looking up the street once more he espied him.

A few words concerning Mr. Gaston Kroogs will not be out of order.

He was about thirty-five years of age, and was not by any means handsome. His most striking feature, when his hat was off, was his bald spot. It extended over nearly the whole top of his head. He was thin, and wore a pair of sparse side-whiskers that did not go to heighten his beauty. But, he was always faultlessly dressed, and in the height of fashion, too. He never allowed a suit of clothes to become old in his possession, and he treated himself to a new silk hat as often as there was a change in style. The first break in a glove condemned the pair immediately.

But then it was a part of his business to be well dressed, and his income was such that he could afford it, though he was not laying anything by for the proverbial rainy day.

He was in the employ of several wholesale houses, and his time was divided among them. When not wanted at one, he was generally wanted at another, and so his time was occupied. In this manner, too, he could keep his business a secret from most of the employees.

Jason watched him until he had entered the store, and then he walked leisurely along and looked in at the windows.

He saw the detective going back toward the rear, where the office was situated.

Passing on, Jason stopped at the corner, and kept his eyes upon the store, to see who passed in and out, expecting that he would see his man on the street again in a little while.

He was not disappointed. After a time Gaston came out and went off down the street.

Jason went along after him.

He had no plan of action outlined. What he had in view was to learn all he could about this man. After that he would give attention to Mr. Ellisdon.

Gaston Kroogs went straight ahead, with no thought that he was being followed, and finally the entrance of one of the leading hotels swallowed him.

Jason, too, went in, and saw his man indulge in a fancy hot drink at the bar, after which he glanced at his watch and passed into the reading-room.

There he took up a paper, and for some time paid no attention to anything else, except that now and then he glanced at his watch.

Jason Garretson stood off at a safe distance, a close observer.

CHAPTER V.

THE PRETTY TYPEWRITER.

AN hour passed; then, with another glance at his watch, Kroogs arose, put on his overcoat

and went out—the amateur detective following after him.

Kroogs walked as though he meant business and a business objective point in view; and he had.

He went to the — Bank, and entered.

Jason followed in, a moment later and acted as though he, too, were full of business. He went to a desk, took up a pen and pretended to be filling out a deposit blank.

Kroogs had taken a place at another desk, and Jason saw him take a check from his pocket and indorse it.

A thought immediately struck the amateur—a plan by which to learn something about that check, if he finally considered it worth his while to take the trouble, and he acted upon it without delay.

Turning over the deposit check that he had been pretending to fill out, he hurriedly wrote:

"Cashier:—I am a detective. Please give me quietly, in writing, the amount and signature of the check just cashed. In haste."

He had no sooner done that than Kroogs took his place at the end of the line that stretched away from the paying-teller's window, and Jason stepped right in behind him.

Finally the window was reached, and Kroogs presented his check.

The teller looked at it carefully, then looked at Kroogs. The latter was known at the bank.

"This amount is all right, is it, Mr. Kroogs?" the teller questioned.

"Yes, it is all right," Kroogs affirmed. "If you have any doubt about it I will wait till you can send or telephone."

"I guess it is straight. The signature is all right. How will you have it, Mr. Kroogs?"

"In fifties, twenties and tens, please," was the answer.

"Fifties, twenties and tens!" thought Jason; "it must be for a considerable sum. I guess I will present my little note and learn something about it."

Jason had his reasons for not wanting to put his question orally. In the first place, Kroogs might pause near the window to count over the money he received, and in that case he would be able to overhear. Secondly, the teller would be sure to engage him in talk for a minute or more, and he might lose sight of Kroogs.

To his surprise he saw the teller run over a big fistful of bills and push it out to the waiting applicant.

"Five hundred at least!" he guessed, mentally.

His guess was not high enough.

As soon as Kroogs stepped away from the window, Jason passed in his written questions, his index finger pointing to the last two words it contained—"In haste."

The teller read it and looked up.

"Bad?" he quickly asked, speaking in a low tone.

"No, I think not," Jason answered in little more than a whisper; "suspicious amount, though."

The teller took his pencil and jotted down a few words on the slip of paper, pushing it back under the brass window-grating.

"Say nothing," Jason said, and taking the paper he returned to a desk and pretended to write again.

Kroogs had not gone out, but was storing his money away into his different inner pockets.

When he had done, finally, he buttoned up his coats and went out, and in a moment more Jason followed.

In the mean time the latter had read what the paying-teller had written. It was simply this:

"Am't — \$1,000; signed Louis Ellisdon."

But, short as it was, it gave Jason a start. For what reason had Ellisdon paid such a sum as that to Kroogs? What service had the latter rendered him that could be considered worth that amount?

The questions puzzled him, but he felt that he was on the right road to a discovery of some sort.

If Kroogs had had any suspicion that he might be followed, it would not have taken him long to have discovered Jason on his track, for the latter was not by any means expert in the work he had undertaken. As Kroogs could have no such suspicion, however, therein lay Jason's advantage.

The suspected detective went straight to another bank, where he deposited all or nearly all of the money he had received.

This time Jason did not go into the bank, for he realized that to do so would arouse suspicion. He could see from the outside, however, what was done.

While he waited an idea hit him.

Right next to the bank was a Jew clothing store, with a number of overcoats hanging out in front. In front of the overcoats a man was walking up and down, doing his best to draw a customer.

Stepping up to the man, Jason pointed to one of the coats and demanded:

"How much for that one?"

"Dot goat?" instantly responded the Jew; "dot goat vas dwenty-five tollars, mine fr'ent, and it vas sheap. Shtep right in—"

"Hold on," Jason interrupted, "I have no time to parley with you. I'll give you ten dollars for it, and put it on. Say quick."

"Mine fr'ent, dot goat—"

"Say yes or no," cried Jason, "and say it quick," and he held out the money and laid a hand on the garment.

"Mine fr'ent, I—"

Jason crammed the bill back into his pocket and turned away.

"Holt on!" protested the Hebrew; "holt on; I vill dake id."

The amateur turned back and the exchange was made, Jason putting on the coat on the spot, the Jew at the same time pouring out a woeful tale about the loss he suffered by the transaction.

The coat selected was a long plaid ulster, and the change it made in the young man's appearance was wonderful. No one who had observed him before, casually, would recognize him as the same person now.

He had just buttoned the coat up when Kroogs emerged from the bank, and when he had passed where Jason stood the latter set out after him again.

Kroogs now returned leisurely to one of the business streets, up which he proceeded until Jason rightly guessed where he was going.

He knew that the detective was employed by the establishment of Brandison, Coolidge & Brandison, and their place was only a little further ahead.

Just before he came there, though, Kroogs stepped into a florist's shop, and when he came out Jason noted that he had a small bouquet in his hand. He recognized it by the shape of its wrapping, for of course it was securely wrapped to protect it against the frosty air.

Jason had stepped some distance back, and was earnestly inspecting the display in a jeweler's window.

When Kroogs went on, he followed as before.

"Whom can that bouquet be intended for, I wonder," Jason reflected. "If he is going to Brandison's he must be sweet on one of the females of that establishment."

They went on, followed and follower, and sure enough Kroogs entered the Brandison, Coolidge & Brandison store.

Jason hesitated about entering, for he was well known to one of the partners of the house, but considering that he had not been in the store for a long time, and that he could perhaps easily evade meeting the man he knew, he went boldly in.

This firm dealt in trimmings, notions etc., and had a large counter display on the first floor. On this floor there were no partitions, but certain portions of the large room were set off by railings to answer the purposes of private offices.

These offices were at the rear of the room, extending for a distance down one side and partly across the rear end.

It was toward that end of the room that Kroogs made his way.

When Jason entered, the detective was about half-way down the room, and he soon disappeared in a little side room opening from the right-hand corner.

A clerk came forward to Jason, to learn what he wanted, and the latter began some invented and complicated inquiry that was bound to exhaust several minutes.

While he was talking with the clerk, Kroogs reappeared.

He had removed his hat and overcoat, and now came forth smiling and bald, the bouquet in his hand.

Jason saw him cross the floor and approach the railing on the other side, on reaching which he opened a gate and went in, making his way toward a corner where a decidedly pretty girl was making her nimble fingers speed over the keys of a typewriter on the desk before her.

She did not look up until Kroogs had passed around far enough to come within her range of vision.

Then her fingers ceased their play, her hands were held over the keyboard as though only a momentary interruption was looked for, and she turned her shapely head to learn who it was that had invaded her corner.

At the sight of Krooge and the bouquet her face flushed painfully, and Jason received the impression that the man's attentions were anything but welcome.

Krooge made a bow to her, said something, and taking a faded bouquet out of a vase on one corner of her desk, put the fresh one into the vase in place of it.

While he was doing this his tongue was rattling away, but Jason was not near enough to overhear what he was saying, and when he had replaced the vase on its proper corner he made another bow, smiled sweetly (!), and withdrew.

By this time Jason had run aground in his talk with the clerk, and had no further excuse for staying there, unless he became a buyer, so he was drawing away.

The clerk noticed that his eyes had been upon the bald-headed Krooge and the pretty typewriter.

"I see you are taking that in," he observed, with a grin.

"Well, yes," responded Jason; "I have an eye for the beautiful."

"Then it is clear that you do not refer to the man," the clerk remarked. "I agree with you fully as to the lady. We are willing to back our typewriter against all comers, for good looks."

"And you would win," Jason honestly avowed. "What is her name?—if you have no objection to telling."

"I believe it is Miss Harland," was the answer. "She is a perfect little lady, too. That fool of a Krooge—that's his name—fancies that he has made an impression upon her, while the truth is she detests the sight of him. He is a drummer, or something of the sort, and puts in his time here when he is not on the road. He dresses well, as you see, and I suppose he thinks he is simply irresistible."

Jason laughed with the clerk, as they moved to the door, and in a moment more he went out. As Krooge evidently intended to stay there, the trail was at an end for the present.

CHAPTER VI.

ONE OF CUPID'S DARTS.

JASON GARRETSON'S mind was filled with a vision of loveliness.

It was the vision of the pretty typewriter. Never, it seemed to him, had he seen a more shapely head or prettier face.

Tilly Harland was indeed a lovely girl. She was about twenty years old, and had just blossomed into perfect womanhood. She was not above the medium height, and was slender, graceful and charmingly molded. Were it not that she was a brunette instead of blonde, our description of Cleanthe Garretson might well apply to her.

Miss Harland was an orphan. When her dead father's estate was settled, according to the statement of her guardian, nothing was left. But she was armed with health, high spirit and a good education, and faced the world bravely. She looked about for something to do, and finally took up short-hand and typewriting, and now was in a good situation and perfectly independent.

As the amateur walked away from the store, he was undecided what next to do. It occurred to him that he might as well go to the Garretson-Ellisdon establishment.

Having reached that decision, he set out. But he did not go there direct. He went first to a house not far from the store, where he engaged a room, and there laid aside his disguise and adopted his own proper attire.

When he entered the store, the first person he met was Ellisdon.

"Ha! good-morning, Jason!" his prospective brother-in-law exclaimed; "I was beginning to think we should not see you to-day."

"Good-morning, if it isn't too late," Jason responded. "I had a little private business to attend to, and came near not getting here this forenoon at all."

"Well, everything is moving along, and we are not run to death with business; but, your father and I want to consult with you on a little matter."

"Very well, I will be with you in the office in a few moments."

Jason passed on, stopped to warm his hands at one of the registers, passed a few words with some of the employees, and finally went on to a rear room and laid aside his hat and overcoat.

A few minutes later he entered the office. His father and Ellisdon were there awaiting him.

"Jason," said his father, "we have got to make an appointment to a position, and we want

to have your voice in the matter. Whom shall we appoint to fill Boyden's place?"

"Have you any one in mind?" Jason asked.

"Mr. Ellisdon has suggested Simon Gifford."

"Two of a kind—birds of a feather!" Jason mentally exclaimed, comparing the person named with Gaston Krooge. Aloud he said:

"Well, if you have agreed upon him we will let him have it. I have no one to suggest for the place, I believe."

"I think Gifford will make a good man," observed Ellisdon.

"Perhaps he will," said Jason. "I would suggest, however," he added, "that he be appointed to fill the place temporarily."

As he said this the young man looked at his father, and the latter took the hint.

"That is a good idea," Mr. Garretson supported.

"But, why not make it permanent?" queried Ellisdon. "It is plain that Mr. Boyden will not return, after what he said this morning—"

"Has he been here this morning?" Jason quickly asked.

Although he had been there on the watch for Krooge, he had not seen Boyden, for the latter had come and gone by a rear entrance.

"Yes, he has been here," answered Mr. Garretson. "Mr. Ellisdon thought that we could overlook his offense and give him another chance, so we sent for him and made the proposition to him."

"And what did he say?"

"He refused point-blank. He still declares his innocence, and vows that he will never enter our doors again until his innocence is acknowledged."

"And for that reason," put in Ellisdon, "I say that the appointment may as well be permanent. It is not likely that his innocence will ever be established."

"You may be right," said Jason, "but I think we had better not be in too much haste about making a permanent appointment. To promote Gifford, will bring several others forward a step in the line of promotion, and if Gifford does not fill the bill to our satisfaction, he will be blocked out of his old place."

"I think Jason is right," decided Mr. Garretson. "We will promote Gifford to the post on trial, with the understanding that he is to go back if we are not perfectly satisfied."

"Well, if you both think that way, of course I will not hold out," acquiesced Ellisdon. "It makes no difference to me one way or the other. Let it be as you say."

He said that it made no difference to him, but Jason Garretson knew better. He had known Ellisdon long enough to have become acquainted with his moods, and now he recognized a mood of sullen disappointment and swallowed choler.

Simon Gifford was sent for, and soon made his appearance.

He was a tall, cadaverous-looking young man of twenty-five, with fiery red hair and freckles innumerable.

"Mr. Gifford," spoke Mr. Garretson, "we think of promoting you. Are you willing to accept the responsible position of superintendent in the vacancy which Mr. Boyden's sudden resignation has made? and do you think that you are competent to fill the place?"

The young man blushed under his freckles.

"I am willing to undertake it, sir," he responded, "and will endeavor to prove myself competent."

"Very well. This promotion is not made permanent, though it may be made so further on. You will enter upon the duties at once."

A shade of disappointment appeared for an instant on Gifford's face, but he drove it away, and thanking his employers for their goodness, went out.

The promotion was soon made known, and other changes followed in order in different parts of the establishment.

Jason Garretson's mind was filled with a new suspicion.

Was not Gifford in some way concerned in the case that had been made out against Howell Boyden? He, Gifford, was about the last one that Jason would have thought of for Boyden's place. There were two or three more capable men in line of promotion, any one of whom was more fitted for the post. Why had they been overlooked?

Jason knew that his father had full confidence in Ellisdon, and that it was not hard to lead him, and he knew that the appointment was wholly the work of that individual. In fact, his father had owned that Ellisdon had suggested Gifford for the post.

Jason had, at first thought, been inclined to oppose the selection, but on second thought he

decided to favor it. It might lead to something. He would play into the hands of Ellisdon all he could, for in spite of everything his mind was full of bitter suspicion against him.

The fact that he had paid Gaston Krooge one thousand dollars, and now that he had appointed such a man as Simon Gifford to the vacant place—these were significant, to say the least.

A little after twelve o'clock Jason and his father went out together for lunch. Jason was strongly tempted to mention his suspicions to his father, but the temptation was overcome. Reflection showed him that it would be hardly wise to do so. Mr. Garretson had unbounded confidence in Ellisdon, and would be pretty apt to treat the suspicion as absurd.

All during the afternoon Jason was haunted.

The face of Miss Harland, the pretty typewriter, was constantly before his mental vision. He did not try to dismiss it, but he would have found it hard to do so if he had tried.

He left the store earlier than usual, and a little time later found him in the neighborhood of Brandison, Cooledge & Brandison's place.

If he had asked himself why he was there, it is pretty likely that he would have furnished some other than the real reason. He was drawn there by that rascally little chap of the bow and quiver—Cupid.

He was not in disguise, and loitered on the opposite side of the street where he could watch the doors of the store.

At about the usual closing hour the employees began to come out and hasten away, and presently he was gratified by a sight of the one whom he desired to see.

Miss Harland stepped out into the cold air, glanced up and down the street, and drawing her cloak close about her, started off at a brisk walk, but, barely had she started when Gaston Krooge came out.

"Satan appeared also," muttered Jason.

Krooge looked neither to the right nor to the left, but set out in the direction the young lady had taken, with a pace which evidently meant to soon overtake her.

Jason, too, stretched his legs in that direction, but he was on the other side of the street and a little distance in the rear of Krooge.

In a little time Krooge came up to Miss Harland, and he spoke to her, lifting his hat with elaborate grace.

The young lady merely glanced at him, drew her cloak still tighter about her shapely form, and hastened on.

Jason could not help seeing that the presence of Krooge was distasteful to her, and that she tried to make him realize it.

But Krooge was not to be balked. He got as close to her side as he could, and walked along with her, talking as though he were wound up for the occasion.

Of course Jason could not hear anything that was said, but he could see that the responses of the young lady were only monosyllabic.

This was kept up until they had gone some distance.

Suddenly, when they had come to a corner where the lady turned in another direction, and where Krooge also turned to go with her, she stopped and faced him.

Jason saw that her lovely face was slightly pale, and that what she said was uttered in a manner most positive.

Krooge turned very red and drew back, lifting his hat, and the young lady went on her way alone; Krooge gazing after her for a moment and then continuing on down the other street.

Jason could not hold back a smile of satisfaction. He did not try to hold it back, in fact.

"A clear case of the grand bounce," he muttered.

He turned down the street the lady had taken, and followed her.

"I can at least learn where she lives," he told himself, "and that will be something gained. I would give a hundred dollars for an honorable introduction to her. Jason, my boy, is it possible that Cupid has succeeded in getting a dart into your callous heart at last? You had better look out, my good friend."

Such musings meant something.

CHAPTER VII.

A TIMELY RESCUE.

TILLY HARLAND sped on as lightly as a fawn. Her every movement was full of grace, and the longer Jason Garretson feasted his eyes upon her, the brighter and hotter burned the spark that had found lodgment in his breast.

The day was raw and cold. The street was

more or less muddy at the crossings, and the walking was disagreeable. But, in spite of all, the pretty typewriter refused to avail herself of the public conveyances.

She was a hardy flower, and it was this brisk walk, night and morning, that kept the roses aglow in her cheeks.

Jason had been getting gradually nearer to the young lady as they walked on, until finally he was close behind her, and a faint, delicate, delicious perfume that was occasionally wafted to him on the air almost impelled him to draw still nearer to her.

He did not blame Gaston Krooge for his devotion, if it were honorably intended.

Of course he had no intention of speaking to her, for he was far too honorable for that, and neither had he any intention of trying to attract her attention to himself.

They proceeded for several blocks in this way, until finally the lady turned, caught up her skirt, and started to cross the street.

A heavy truck was thundering down toward her, but she had measured its distance with a quick eye, and started on a little run to cross ahead of it.

She had time enough, though none to spare, and would have made the crossing safely but for a sudden mishap. She stepped on something slippery, her feet flew from under her, and she fell—right in front of the on-coming horses.

All who witnessed her fall were chilled with horror, and many covered their faces with their hands, or turned away their heads, to avoid witnessing more.

Her danger was imminent, and it looked as though nothing short of a miracle could save her from being trampled to death.

The driver of the truck made every effort to check his horses, or turn them aside, but the distance was too short. He made desperate efforts, yet it was patent to all observers that it would be impossible for him to stop or turn aside in time.

Barely a second had elapsed, but a second is a long period of time under such circumstances. Scarcely sooner was the danger realized than a man was seen rushing to the rescue.

That man was Jason Garretson.

We have described him as having the physique of a splendidly trained athlete. All his agility of action and power of muscle stood him in hand now.

Right in front of the team he dashed, right under their heads, almost, he stooped, and from under their very hoofs he snatched the form of the girl, and, with a quick and powerful spring, made what had seemed to be an impossible escape.

The truck thundered on, and, pressing the frightened girl close to his breast, the rescuer bore her safely to the sidewalk.

Those who had witnessed it all drew a deep breath of relief, and some one gave vent to a vigorous "Hurrah!" That was caught up immediately, and three cheers and a tiger were given with a vim.

The young lady had not fainted, but her face was as white as death, and as Jason looked down upon it as it lay against his breast for the few brief moments, her big, lovely eyes looked up into his with an expression of thankfulness that he never forgot.

From that moment his heart was all on fire with love for her.

As soon as he reached the sidewalk he put her feet upon the ground, but did not yet release his hold of her, asking:

"Are you hurt, miss? Do you think you can stand?"

"I—I guess I am not hurt badly," she answered; "I am more frightened than hurt. But, oh, sir, how can I thank you?"

"Do not mention it," Jason forbade. "The pleasure of knowing that I was able to rescue you more than repays me. But, you are hurt," he exclaimed, noticing that she limped as he let go of her; "shall I not lead you into the store and call a cab for you?"

"No, no, it is not necessary," she declined; "I have only a little distance to go now, and I can walk."

She limped so painfully, however, at her next attempt to walk, that Jason caught hold of her arm without further ceremony.

"Pardon me," he said kindly, "but I must insist upon helping you. I believe you have sprained an ankle. If your home is only a little distance away, you surely will allow me to assist you to the door."

"I believe you are right, that my foot is sprained," she now owned, "and if you will be so kind as to help me just a few doors—"

"It will be a pleasure," Jason cried; and requesting her to lean heavily upon his arm he led her away and out of the assembling crowd.

In his heart he was secretly glad that she had met with the mishap, since it had not resulted seriously. He had actually had her in his arms! He had actually pressed her to his heart! He actually felt her gentle weight upon his strong arm now! Accident had paved the way for him to make her acquaintance.

"It was very daring of you," he observed, "to attempt to cross ahead of that team."

"I know it," she owned, "but I had no thought of falling. I had plenty of time, but my foot slipped and down I went. What a plight I am in!"

"Do not mind a little mud," cheerily, "but rather be thankful that you are not worse injured than you are."

"I am thankful, sir, more thankful than I can attempt to express; thankful to you—"

"Please do not thank me at all; give your thanks to Providence. As I told you before, I am more than repaid."

"Well, I suppose I must obey you, since you insist upon it, but I shall never forget your bravery and kindness— But, here is where I want to go, sir."

"And be assured that I shall never forget you," as he assisted her up the steps. "Your face, as I saw it during the brief moments that I held you in my arms, will haunt me to the end of my days."

He looked into her face now as he uttered the words, and saw a rosy color rise quickly to the pale cheeks.

She, too, remembered the moment well, and could he have read her thoughts he would have learned a secret that had just made itself known to her.

No more could be said, for he had rung the bell, and barely had he finished what he was saying when the door opened.

A strong-looking woman, evidently a domestic, stood before them.

"Oh! it is you, Ann," the young lady exclaimed; "I am so glad, for you can assist me to my room. I have had a fall, and a very narrow escape from being run over. I believe my ankle is sprained. Only for this gentleman, who has kindly assisted me home—"

"There, spare me, please do," Jason interrupted. "I see you are in good and friendly hands, and I will take my leave."

He had raised his hat and was turning away, when she held out her hand to him frankly.

"I insist upon saying a final thank you," she said.

"And I accept it as a reward of which I am not deserving," Jason responded.

Their hands met, and for one moment so did their eyes, and then Jason turned, ran lightly down the steps and walked rapidly away.

There was a commotion in his breast that was new to him.

He had met many charming girls, and had enjoyed himself in their society, but now he realized that he was in love.

He felt so exhilarated that a smile lit up his face.

"Jason, my good fellow," he communed with himself, "you have gone and put your foot into it now. You have met your fate at last, as sure as time. You are in love, and there is no use trying to deny it. And, the question is: What are you going to do about it?"

He weighed the question then and there, and his decision was soon reached.

"Be she princess or peasant," he finally muttered, "she shall be my wife if I can win her. Out of my road, Krooge, and everybody else! I love her, and my first love shall be my bride!"

He retraced his steps the way he had come, and had nearly reached the main street on which the store was situated when he saw some one pass to whom his attention was drawn by the very fact that he was going in that direction.

The person he saw was Simon Gifford.

Jason knew that he lived in another direction to that in which he was now hastening, and resolved on the instant to follow him.

Having on no disguise, he knew that he would have to use care, but he had now had some experience and felt that he could follow such a person as Gifford without danger of discovery.

The fellow led him quite a long walk, but finally entered the hotel into which Jason had that morning tracked Krooge.

It struck Jason immediately that he was going there to meet Krooge now.

If such was the case, the amateur detective knew that it would not do for him to risk recognition if he expected to learn anything. He gave Krooge credit for a good deal of shrewd-

ness, and if he were to espy him in the hotel he would give him no chance to learn anything.

A disguise had to be had immediately. Here Jason, amateur though he was, had the advantage over many a professional detective. He had plenty of money to back him, and almost unlimited credit wherever he was known.

Only a few steps away was a clothing store, not a Jew's den this time, but one of the largest of the city.

Jason hurried to that and entered.

"I have met with a little accident to my overcoat," he explained, showing the mud that was on it from its contact with the muddy cloak of the young lady he had rescued. "I want a new one immediately. I want one entirely different from this one; it makes no difference what it is, so long as it is different, and I get it quickly."

He threw off his coat while he was speaking, and the clerk had another for him to put on in almost no time.

It was a great ulster of the "English-you-know" sort, and the young detective was almost lost in it.

Without waiting to see whether it fitted him well or not, Jason called for a fur cap, and that, too, was immediately forthcoming. His disguise was secured.

Taking some bills and one of his cards from his pocket, the amateur detective thrust them into the hand of the astonished clerk, telling him to send the coat and hat to the address given, together with the change; and buttoning up the newly-acquired coat as he went, he hurried from the store.

CHAPTER VIII.

A SPOKE IN JASON'S WHEEL.

ONE thing Jason Garretson had already learned.

That one thing was—that he had a decided liking for detective work.

He found in it a fascination of which he had never dreamed. He could no longer wonder why most professional detectives were in love with their calling.

And, too, now that he had made a beginning in this case, he meant to see it to the end. He had now two incentives. First, the determination and desire to right the wrong that had been done to Howell Boyden; and second—second in order though not in importance—his resolve to learn the true character of Louis Ellison before his sister had taken the irrevocable step.

He pulled the fur cap low down upon his head, when he had finished buttoning the coat, and then to further perfect the disguise, he took the ends of his mustache into his mouth.

This last made a wonderful alteration in his looks, and the chances were about ten to one that he would not be recognized.

He entered the corridor of the hotel, his hands thrust deep into the breast pockets of the big, heavy ulster.

Not seeing his man, he went on, and finally found him seated in the reading-room.

Gifford was alone, and acted like a cat in a strange garret. That is to say, he was looking around as though he did not feel at home there.

He looked at Jason as the latter entered the room, but no sign of recognition appeared upon his face. Jason sauntered in leisurely, passed around where Gifford was seated, and dropped into a seat directly behind him.

The seats were arranged back to back, as they are seen frequently in public rooms. In front, on both sides, were tables, on which were papers and writing materials.

As Jason sat down he took up a paper, and, spreading it out before him, pretended to read. If any one joined Gifford where he sat, Jason knew that he was in a good situation to hear and see everything that passed between them.

The room was well filled, and the hum of conversation was incessant. No two persons need have any fear that what they were talking about would be overheard by a third, in such a place, so long as they talked in moderate tones.

Some minutes passed, and presently Jason saw Gaston Krooge come in.

He looked around as though to discover some particular person, and Gifford raised his hand to draw his attention.

Gaston lifted his brows, smiled, strode forward and took a seat by Gifford's side.

For the moment Jason buried himself deeper than ever into his paper.

"I see you are here," he heard Krooge say.

"Yes, I am on hand," was Gifford's response.

"Well, did you get the place?" Krooge asked.

"Yes," was the answer, "I got it."

"Ha! good! I had some doubts about your

getting it, but I did all I could for you. Now you want to take care that you keep it."

"Oh, I shall try to do that."

"No doubt about that, but you must exert yourself to bring your work up to a level with that of Boyden. Is your appointment permanent?"

"No, it is only on trial."

"All the more reason, then, why you must strain every effort to hold fast to it. I wish you success, I am sure."

"Thank you. And now what about my pay?"

"What pay?"

"Why, what you promised me, of course."

"Let me see, how much was I to give you?"

"A hundred dollars."

"Yes, so it was. No fear of your forgetting the amount, I see. Here is the sum."

With a sly glance over his shoulder Jason saw some money change hands.

His heart beat hard with the excitement of the disclosure. Now he felt sure of his ground, and that his suspicion was correct. Here was proof almost positive that Howell Boyden had been ousted from his place by foul treachery, of which Gaston Krooge and Simon Gifford were at the bottom.

Was Louis Ellidson concerned in it too? The fact of his having paid Krooge a thousand dollars and having appointed Gifford to the vacant place, were sharp points against him.

Gifford counted the money and put it into his pocket.

"Is it right?" Krooge asked.

"Yes," Simon acknowledged, "it is right."

"Then our account is squared. Remember, though," speaking in a lower tone, "that you must not let this matter get out. If you do it will go hard with you. You must be careful."

"You can trust me for that," said Simon; "I wasn't born yesterday."

"Very well; and I guess we have no more to say. I have a call to make after supper, and I must be going."

"And so must I," said Gifford, as he, too, arose.

"I suppose we may as well part right here," Krooge suggested.

"Yes, I suppose so."

"Well, then, ta-ta," and with a wave of his hand the rascally mercantile detective turned on his heel and strode out of the room.

Gifford watched him until he vanished through the door, and then feeling to be sure that the hundred dollars was safe in his pocket, he, too, went out.

Jason threw the paper from him and leaned back to reflect.

He had made a big discovery, but what use should he make of it? How should he proceed in the case? He was new in the business in which he now found himself engaged, and did not know how to handle his points gained.

At first he thought he would make a confidant of his father in the matter, but reflection decided him against that course. His father was too much prejudiced in Ellidson's favor.

The second suggestion that came to him met with more favor.

No one had a deeper interest in the case than Howell Boyden. Why not go and consult with him?

Jason considered this for a moment, and decided to act upon it.

By this time the afternoon had merged into the evening, and it was dark. The dinner hour would be at hand by the time Jason could reach home.

He was decidedly hungry, and having nothing to detain him longer, set out for home immediately. It would be time enough to go and see Boyden after dinner.

His appearance in such a coat occasioned much surprise and comment when he entered the house, but he easily explained the matter by giving a casual account of the accident to the young lady and the damage to his other overcoat.

"Well, Jason," observed his father, as they sat at the table, "have you discovered anything further in connection with Boyden's case?"

"Yes, I have," Jason made answer, "but I am not yet prepared to tell you about it, father. I want to investigate a little further, and when I am done I will lay my discoveries before you."

"All right, my boy, go ahead."

"And in the mean time, father, do not forget that you have promised not to say a word to any one about what I am doing."

"All right, Jason, I will remember."

"I mean not even to Ellidson."

"I understand. By the way, that was noble

of him, wasn't it?—his proposition to take Boyden back and reinstate him."

"It was, indeed," Jason concurred; but he had to muzzle the voice of his conscience while he forced the words.

"Did he really do that?" asked Cleanthe, with a show of interest.

"Yes, he did!" cried Mr. Garretson proudly.

"I tell you he is a man in a thousand, my girl."

The conversation ran on, as did also the time and the dinner, and all came to the inevitable—an end.

Jason went to his room as soon as he rose from the table.

He intended to smoke a cigar, and then to go and see Boyden. He had no engagement on hand, and the time was his own.

On entering his room he found that a package had arrived for him while he was at dinner, and on opening it, he found that it was from the clothing store where he had purchased the big coat in such haste.

His coat, hat and change were in the box, and a glance at the coat showed him that it had been cleaned and pressed.

"This is a blessing," he told himself, "for I won't have to present myself in this hateful attire. I detest these big ulsters heartily."

While he was still examining the returned coat and hat, there came a light knock at the door.

He opened it, and there stood Cleanthe.

"May I come in?" he asked.

"Certainly," he answered and he threw the door open wide.

She entered, closed the door, and helped herself to a chair.

"To what am I indebted for this visit, my pretty sister?" Jason asked.

"To something that you said at table, brother mine," was the answer.

"I thought so."

"You thought so! What do you imagine I am here for, then? Come, now, you are astute; answer that."

"You are anxious to know what it is that I have learned relative to that charge against Howell Boyden."

Cleanthe blushed.

"You are right," she owned. "Well, what have you discovered?"

"I have discovered that he is innocent beyond the shadow of a doubt."

"I am glad to hear you say it. Of course you will speedily declare him so. Will you tell me about it, Jason?"

"Yes, I shall right the wrong as speedily as possible. 'Anthe; as to telling you about it now, you had better wait a little. I will tell you this, however: I have hold of a two-edged sword, and when I begin to wield it somebody is going to get hurt."

"What are you talking about? You have got my curiosity worked up to the highest pitch now."

Just then they were interrupted by another knock at the door, and Jason received a sealed note from the hand of a servant.

"The man is waiting for an answer, sir," the servant said.

A glance at the superscription told Jason whom the note was from. It was a square envelope, heavy-tinted and perfumed, and was addressed in a woman's hand.

Tearing it open without delay he drew out the sheet it contained, and with it came something else that fell to the floor. Cleanthe stooped and picked that up, while Jason read the note, which was as follows:

"Six o'clock.

"DEAR MR. GARRETSON:—

"In my dilemma I come to you. A friend from out of town has run in to see me, and she is crazy to go to the opera. As she has to return home tomorrow, to-night is her only chance. If you possibly can, will you do me the great favor to act as our escort? I inclose the tickets. If you can oblige me, my carriage will be sent to you. Sincerely,

"MR. JASON GARRETSON. HERMIONE ELLIDSON."

CHAPTER IX.

AN UNEXPECTED REVELATION.

HERMIONE ELLIDSON was Godard Ellidson's daughter—sister to Louis.

She was about thirty years old, and a brunette of the strongest type. She looked greatly like her brother. If anything, he was the better looking. She was tall, and inclined to be angular, her eyes, brows and hair were of the blackest, and there was more down on her upper lip than was becoming.

Still, withal, she was not really homely. She had a plump face and a clear skin, and was graceful in movement and almost brilliant in conversation. But she was not as young as she

had been twelve years before, and no one realized more keenly than she that she was growing no younger. Her seasons in society had been many, and she was no nearer now to the goal of the average woman's ambition—matrimony—than she had been at the start.

So much by the way.

When Jason Garretson had read the note, he crushed it in his hand with a muttered complaint, and there was a scowl upon his handsome face.

"What is it?" his sister asked.

He handed the note to her and took a turn up and down the room.

This knocked his plans all in the head. He did not see how he could get out of complying with the request, and yet he hated to do so. Now his visit to Howell Boyden would have to be put off.

"Here are the tickets she mentions," said Cleanthe, handing them back with the note when she had finished reading it. "You will have to go, Jason; I don't see how you can get out of it. But, then, perhaps you do not really want to get out of it."

"Confound it, sis, I don't see how I can go!" Jason exclaimed. "I wanted to go around and see Howell Boyden to-night."

Cleanthe's face was sober in an instant.

"If it is really important," she observed, "you will have to send an excuse to Miss Ellidson. If it is anything that can be put off, though, you will have to put it off. Nothing short of death, almost, should keep you from doing the favor asked."

"I know it, and I heartily wish she would find some one else to be her escort. I am getting rather tired of her—"

Remembering that the servant was at the door, he checked himself, stepped to the table and wrote a hurried acceptance, handed it to the servant and closed the door upon her.

"One would think that Hermione Ellidson holds a first mortgage upon my time," he snapped, testily.

"So she does," observed Cleanthe, her eyes flashing mischievously.

"What?" exclaimed Jason.

"A mortgage of love," Cleanthe supplemented. "You know as well as I do that she is in love with you, Jason."

"If she is, the best thing that she can do is to get out again," Jason growled.

A vision of loveliness—the face of the pretty typewriter—came up before him, and immediately he hated himself for having acceded to Miss Ellidson's wish.

"About the best way to dispose of her is to marry her," Cleanthe recommended. "We might get up a double wedding," she went on, "and you marry her at the same time that I marry Louis. Then the two families will be doubly united."

"Never!" Jason cried. "I would not marry her under any circumstances. And, if I can prevent it, neither shall you marry Louis."

"Why, what can you mean?" Cleanthe questioned, in much surprise.

"I mean just what I say," Jason declared. "Louis Ellidson is not worthy to possess you, and I mean to block his game if I can do it. I did not mean to tell you this yet, but it popped out, and now I see I shall have to tell you more."

"You must tell me what you mean," Cleanthe urged.

"I will do so. You must not let it be known yet, however, and you must not let him suspect anything. I am satisfied that Louis Ellidson has had something to do with Howell Boyden's fall."

"Good heavens!"

A new suspicion dawned upon the girl's mind, but it was one that she did not make known then.

"What I say is my honest conviction," Jason went on.

"But have you any proof of it?" Cleanthe asked.

"Well, I have and I haven't. My task is not done yet. But, do not let this be known. Guard it carefully. You know that father would not credit it for a moment. Above all things, do not let Louis suspect that I hold such a suspicion."

"I will do as you ask. I will not let him suspect. But, Jason, your suspicion must speedily be proved or disproved; it cannot rest at this."

"I am well aware of that, and— But," glancing at his watch, "I have no time to spare if I am to keep this engagement. Keep this matter to yourself, and we will talk it over more fully at the first opportunity."

"Very well."

Cleanthe left the room, not in an easy state of mind by any means, and Jason made haste to

don evening dress and prepare for an unwelcome role.

By the time he was ready the arrival of the carriage was announced, and a little time later found him at the Ellisdon residence.

The ladies were ready and waiting, as he found when he was shown into the parlor, and they both rose as he entered, Miss Ellisdon hastening to introduce him to her friend.

The latter was a woman some years Miss Ellisdon's senior, and was introduced as Mrs. Carrington.

As their eyes met, Jason noticed that this woman seemed to give a start of recognition, though he was sure that he had never seen her before in his life.

"If I am not mistaken I have seen you before, Mr. Garretson," she observed.

"It is quite possible," Jason answered, "but I do not remember you."

"It was only this afternoon that I saw you," the woman explained. "I was coming down a street, and my attention was drawn to a pretty girl who attempted daringly to cross ahead of an approaching team. She slipped and fell, and really my heart stopped beating with fear. I expected to see her crushed to death in a moment, for the team was almost upon her, but just at the critical moment, Hermione," turning now to her, "Mr. Garretson—I am sure it was he—ran out and caught her up, at the risk of his own life, and— But, pshaw! now I remember that I told you all about it when I came in."

"Yes, so you did," acknowledged Miss Ellisdon, "but little did I think that the noble rescuer would prove to be Mr. Garretson. How brave of you!" she exclaimed, laying her hand upon his arm.

"I shall believe, I shall have to believe," remarked Jason, "that I have done something really heroic, if you keep on. But, I assure you it was nothing of the kind. I merely lifted the young lady up and carried her to the sidewalk. It was nothing."

"It was not so considered by those who witnessed it, if the cheer they gave meant anything," put in Mrs. Carrington.

"Indeed, no!" exclaimed Miss Ellisdon. "But, come, let us be going," she added, "or we shall be late. Mr. Garretson can tell us all about it in the carriage."

They left the house immediately and entered the carriage, and as it started off Jason turned the conversation into another channel, to avoid hearing anything more about his heroism.

But it seemed that Miss Ellisdon was bound to know more, or else to give him further praise, for no sooner was there a break in the conversation than she asked:

"By the way, Mr. Garretson, did you learn the name of the young lady whom you rescued so bravely?"

Jason felt vindictive. He had hoped that the subject would not be mentioned again.

"I happened to know her name," he answered. "She is a Miss Harland."

"Harland!" exclaimed Hermione, with a sudden show of increased interest; "it seems to me that that name is familiar to me. Do you know anything more about her, Mr. Garretson?"

"Only that she is a typewriter, employed in the House of Brandon, Cooledge & Brandon," he responded.

He hoped that this would end it all.

"Why, that is my brother's ward!" Hermione exclaimed.

"What!"

It was now Jason's turn to be surprised, and the word he uttered popped out quick and sharp.

"I said that Miss Harland is my brother's ward," she repeated.

"Is it possible?" Jason said aloud, but speaking more to himself than to Miss Ellisdon. "I never knew that Louis Ellisdon had a ward."

"Oh, yes, he has one," Hermione confirmed, "and Tilly Harland is the person."

Tilly! That was her name, eh? Jason caught it eagerly, and it seemed to him that it had a more musical ring than any other name he had ever heard.

"I presume you know who she is, and all about her," he observed.

"You seem interested in her," Hermione remarked.

"I am," Jason frankly acknowledged.

"She is an orphan," Hermione explained.

"Her mother died when she was quite young, and her father died about four years ago. My father was her guardian, but when he was taken down he turned the charge over to Louis."

"And was she left without any means?" Jason asked.

"Yes, almost entirely so. My father made an effort to get some property for her, to which she had some claim, but he had not succeeded when he died. Later on it was found that there was no hope of her ever getting it, and Louis so informed her."

"So she was left without anything, eh?"

"Yes, I believe so. I guess Louis helped her, however. She went to a private school for some time and learned stenography and typewriting, and that was the last I heard of her until tonight. I could have little interest in her, you know, as she was so far below me socially. Our station is above typewriters, you must acknowledge, and— Ah, here we are at our destination."

Jason was glad of it. He felt that his response to the last cutting remarks would be anything but agreeable, and gladly let the whole matter drop.

The evening was almost a blank to him. He took no interest in anything, and Hermione Ellisdon could not help noticing that his thoughts were elsewhere. She felt that her scheme to gain his company for the evening had resulted in little gain to her. It was a case of love's labor lost. A spirit of jealousy rose in her heart. Was he thinking of Tilly Harland?

The evening passed, somehow, and Jason Garretson was heartily glad when he once more found himself at home and in his own room.

CHAPTER X.

A FORCED CONFESSION.

NEXT morning Jason made it his first business of the day to go and see Howell Boyden.

He went as early as he considered proper, in order not to let Howell get out before he reached there, and thus miss him.

Boyden boarded with his father and mother, in their quiet little home. His father was well-to-do, and owned the house in which they lived.

Jason found the young man at home, and he was heartily welcomed. Howell gave him the cue immediately that he had not made known his disgrace to his parents, and of course Jason was careful not to let it out.

After a little time Howell put on his hat and coat and the two young men went out together.

"It is too early to ask you up to my room," Howell explained, "and the next best thing was to come out with you and go to some place where we can talk freely. I am sure that you want to talk with me."

"You are right," Jason declared, promptly. "I have some important things to say to you. We will take a stroll, in any direction where we will be likely not to meet any of the store hands and we can talk as we walk."

"Good enough. We can keep right on in this direction."

"I believe I have asked you once before," Jason said, coming at once to the subject, "if you have any suspicion of any one besides Krooge."

"Yes, you asked me that, and I told you that I had not," Howell answered.

"Have you heard that Simon Gifford has been promoted to your place?"

"Simon Gifford?"

"Yes."

"No, I had not heard it. He is the very last person of all that I would have considered fit for the place. By whose recommendation was he promoted?"

"I will tell you that presently. Do you think that Gifford had anything to do with the charge against you?"

"I would not utter a word of suspicion against him for the world, Mr. Garretson, without something to back it."

"Well, what do you think about Mr. Ellisdon?"

"I—I do not know what you mean."

"I mean just the same that I meant when I asked about Gifford. Do you think Ellisdon could have any object in getting you out of the establishment?"

Jason's questions were firmly put, and Howell saw that they were full of meaning.

"I do not know how to reply," was the answer. "I cannot say a word against either of them. No, no, I will not utter one word against them."

"This is beating about the bush, Howell. We must have some plain talk. I have something to tell you presently that will knock you silly, almost, but first I desire to get a pointer or two."

"Well, Mr. Garretson, I will help you all I can, but I will not say anything that will turn suspicion upon any one, unless I have good grounds for doing so."

"I begin to see that I shall have to show my

hand first then. I will do so in one moment. Now we might say that Gifford was in the plot, for the purpose of getting your place; but what was Ellisdon to gain by the operation?"

"Why do you persist in bringing him into it?"

"It was he who named Simon Gifford for the vacant post."

"Ha! I suspected—"

He stopped abruptly.

"What did you suspect?" Jason demanded.

"My surprise, if I may call it that, brought the words out before I was aware of what I was saying," said Howell. "If I have a suspicion, Mr. Garretson, it is one that, for a certain reason, I cannot name. I hope you will not press me further."

"Oh, but I shall," cried Jason. "I am determined to get at the bottom of the affair, and I depend on you to help me. You have more real interest in it than any one else, unless I except—"

"Unless you except whom?" the young man asked eagerly, as Jason came to an abrupt stop.

"My sister Cleanthe."

As he spoke, Jason looked straight at his companion's face.

Howell Boyden turned red in an instant.

"Your sister!" he exclaimed in confusion.

"Exactly so," said Jason.

There was an awkward pause—awkward on the part of Boyden.

"I am determined to know nothing," the latter finally declared. "You will have to show your hand, as you call it."

"Very well," agreed Jason, "I will do so. First, however, I want you to promise me that you will keep secret what I am about to disclose to you. I am sure I can trust you, but I want your promise."

"You may have it. I promise."

"Good. And now pay attention. Yesterday morning Louis Ellisdon paid Gaston Krooge one thousand dollars. What was that for? Late yesterday afternoon Krooge paid Simon Gifford one hundred dollars."

"Good heavens! can this be true?"

"Do you doubt my word?"

"Oh, no; my words were only expressive of my surprise. But, how did you find all this out?"

"I have been playing detective."

"Playing detective?"

"Exactly. And, not only did I learn the facts I have mentioned, but I heard a conversation between Krooge and Gifford."

"You must be a detective in earnest."

"I only wish I were, for a little while. But, what do you think of what I have told you?"

"Well, to say the least it looks strange."

"I should say so! Now can you give any reason why Louis Ellisdon would pay Gaston Krooge a thousand dollars to get you out of the store in disgrace?"

Boyden was thoughtful.

"No," he answered, "I cannot, unless— But, I will not speak of that."

"You will not speak of what? Come, Howell, this is no time to mince matters in this way. Speak right out."

"No, Jason—Mr. Garretson—"

"Call me Jason," Jason interrupted. "I detest so much formality. We are not at the store now."

"I was about to say that I will not disclose the thought that is in my mind. I have no right to do so."

"Very well, then I shall have to guess at it. You are aware that Ellisdon is in love with my sister, and that he has been trying to win her hand. When I spoke her name a moment ago your face got as red as a lobster. I believe that you are not far from having a tender passion in the same direction yourself. Now, did not Ellisdon fear you as a rival, and take this means to dispose of you?"

For some moments Boyden was silent, his eyes turned to the ground.

Presently he spoke.

"Jason," he said, "you force a confession from me. Had you not spoken as you have, I would never breathe a word of what I am about to say. Even as it is, I speak to you in confidence. It must go no further. It is true that I love Cleanthe Garretson—love her madly, but of course I could never make my love known to her. That was out of the question. The gulf between our social positions is impassable."

"I am not so sure about that," observed Jason, thinking of Miss Ellisdon's words in a like strain regarding Tilly Harland. "I know how you feel about it, though," he added.

"Whenever Miss Garretson has been at the

store, and I had opportunity to show her any kindly attention," Boyden went on, "I have taken advantage of it. Mr. Ellisdon may have noticed it, and may have read my secret. I do not know. How he could look upon me as a rival, though, I cannot understand."

"Perhaps he saw more than you did."

"What do you mean?"

"Howell, I am going to speak plainly to you. I told you a few minutes ago that you have more interest in this case than any one else, unless I except—my sister. I believe that she has more than a passing interest in you."

"Do you mean it, Jason?" Boyden asked, with sudden eagerness. "But, no," he added, "it is altogether beyond my hope. I must give up the thought at once and forever."

"Yes, I mean it," Jason assured. "But," he added, "Cleanthe is now the promised wife of Louis Ellisdon."

He saw that this sudden announcement cut Boyden like a knife, but Boyden made no comment.

"Now," Jason demanded, "what do you think of the case?"

"I do not know what to think," was the answer.

"But, I want your opinion," Jason persisted. "I have come to you for help, as you have a decided interest in it, and I want you to advise me. Now, do you think that Gaston Krooge—"

"He is a mean, contemptible liar and scamp!"

"Good enough. Now, do you think that Louis Ellisdon hired him to make out the case against you?"

"What you have told me fixes my suspicion strongly upon him. The fact that he has just paid Krooge a thousand dollars is significant."

"You are right. Now, what about Gifford?"

"He would certainly not hesitate long, where a good position and a hundred dollars were held out as bait."

"I see that we both think alike. I believe that Ellisdon feared you as a rival. That he resolved to put you out of his path. He took Krooge into his confidence, promising him a thousand dollars if he would bring about the desired result. Krooge hired Gifford to put the articles into your coat pocket. When all was ready, Krooge sprung the trap and you were knocked down and dragged out—so to say."

"I believe you have hit it right."

"I am sure that I have, Howell. I have had my eye upon Louis Ellisdon for a long time, and I suspected him immediately. Now, I intend not only to right the wrong that has been done you, but I will tear the mask from his face and save my sister from throwing herself away upon him. She has no love for him as it is, but is marrying him to please father and mother."

"I had rather see her become the wife of any one else," said Howell.

They talked on for some time, but reached no really definite plan of action. It was agreed that Boyden should trust everything to Jason, and that for the time being he should remain quiet. Jason promised to straighten the matter out as soon as he possibly could, and, thinking of his own mad passion for Tilly Harland, gave Howell the encouraging hint that perhaps his love for Cleanthe might meet its reward.

CHAPTER XI.

CUPID SHOOTS AGAIN

WHEN the two young men parted, Boyden returned home and Jason set out in the direction of the Brandison-Cooledge store.

He was anxious to learn whether Tilly Harland was at her post or not. If not, it would be safe to assume that her sprained ankle was the cause.

When he reached the store he went boldly in, and his eyes first sought the pretty typewriter's place. She was not in her chair, and her writing-machine was covered and idle.

A shade of disappointment came over his face. He looked around the store, and saw the younger Mr. Brandison, with whom he was well acquainted.

Harvey Brandison was about of his own age, and a fine-looking man. He was married—Jason was secretly glad that he was the happy father of two or three pretty children.

He saw Jason at about the same time that Jason saw him, and came forward at once with hand outstretched.

"Hello, Jason!" he exclaimed; "glad to see you. What fortunate wind drives you around here?"

Jason shook hands with him, responding pleasantly, and they fell into a conversation.

"By the way, where is your pretty typewriter?" Jason asked, after awhile, as they were passing along on that side of the store.

"Ah!" his companion exclaimed, "you have seen her, have you? We shall have to look out, or you will be taking her over to your place. Why, she sent word down this morning that she has sprained her ankle and can not get here today. She met with an accident as she was going home yesterday, I believe. Do you know her, Jason?"

"No, I don't," Jason responded; "but I am anxious to know her," he frankly added.

"Then you have seen her?"

"Yes, I saw her yesterday for the first time, when I dropped in here for a moment. I want to get an introduction to her, Harvey."

"Ha, ha! You are not the only one, Jason. But, you wouldn't be able to get up a flirtation with her; no use trying."

"See here, Harvey," Jason said, speaking low and earnestly, "you once made a confidant of me, and I am going to make one of you. I am in love with that girl, and I want you to help me to an introduction to her."

"Whew! That is the case, eh? Do you mean it, Jason?"

"I do, positively."

"I'm glad of it, by George! I can fix it for you easily. My wife knows the little lady well, and some evening she can ask her to come around to our house. I will give you the tip, and you can come there the same evening."

"Will you do that, Harvey?"

"Yes, certainly."

"All right, go ahead and arrange it, and I shall be a thousand times obliged to you. You need not give it away, but if I can win that girl I am going to marry her. I mean it, too."

"Ha, ha, ha! You are struck hard, and no mistake. But, she is a treasure, and my word for it you couldn't make a better selection. I thought, though, that you were booked to marry Miss Ellisdon."

"Never!" Jason exclaimed.

"I have heard your names associated together more than once."

"You won't hear them mentioned together any more if I can help it," was the snapped response. "By the way, are you aware that Louis Ellisdon is Miss Harland's guardian?"

"No!"

"Well, he is, if I have been correctly informed, and I got it from Miss Ellisdon last night."

They talked on, Jason presently mentioning about his rescuing Miss Harland from being run over; this coming out in explaining how her name had come to be mentioned between himself and Miss Ellisdon.

Of course he said nothing about the other matters.

Finally, as he was about going away, Jason observed:

"Do not let it be known to Miss Harland that I am the person who rescued her, if in any way my name is mentioned to her. Your wife might let it out, you know, if you do not caution her. It will be a surprise for Miss Harland."

"All right, it shall not be mentioned. And—Oh! by the way, here is something that I came near forgetting to mention: You will have a rival—in fact, you have got one already."

"A rival!"

Jason's mind turned instantly to Krooge, but he was afraid that there was yet another in the background.

"Yes, and a determined one," declared his friend.

"Who is it?"

"Why, it is no less a personage than our Detective Krooge."

"Oh! I care nothing for him. You keep your eye upon the career of Krooge, and one of these days you will hear something that will surprise you. There, do not ask me anything, for I cannot explain now. Say nothing, however."

"All right, I'll say nothing. I was about to ask you, though, about your man Boyden. We have heard that he has left you suddenly."

The conversation turning upon that, Jason told all that he thought was proper about the case, and in a little while took his leave.

He had got only a little distance from the store when he met Krooge.

Krooge saluted him servilely, and halted as though he wanted to say something.

"Good-morning, Mr. Garretson," he said, when Jason stopped; "it is a charming morning, is it not? I hear, Mr. Garretson, that you are determined to believe Mr. Boyden innocent of the charge which I made against him. I hope that you did not mean to cast reflection upon my reputation as a detective, sir."

"I have said nothing that you can have got hold of, Krooge," was Jason's response, "except that I believed there must have been some mis-

take. I want to ask you if you are downright positive in the matter."

"Why, of course I am," was the assurance. "I have to believe the evidence of my own eyes, sir."

"And there was no chance for you to be mistaken in the person?"

"Not the least, sir."

"Well, it is hard to believe it of Mr. Boyden, but of course the word of a professional detective like yourself is not to be questioned."

"I have my reputation at stake, Mr. Garretson, and it is not likely that I would have dared make such a charge without being sure of my grounds."

"I should think not, Krooge."

Jason went on, for he felt such a strong desire to knock the rascal to the ground that he did not dare trust himself in his presence any longer.

As for Krooge, a meaning smile was upon his face as he watched Jason for a moment before going on his way.

"I guess I have shut his eyes," he chuckled, "and now the coast is all clear. Now it is not likely that there will be anything more said about the affair."

Little did he know the man he had to deal with.

Krooge had just been to inquire concerning Miss Harland. Hearing about her accident, after her note had been received at the store, he had set out immediately.

On his way there he bought a bouquet; he had somehow learned that the young lady was passionately fond of flowers; and in a short time presented himself at the door of her boarding-house.

Miss Harland was not aware that Krooge knew where she lived. She had always positively refused to allow him to accompany her home, though he had persistently attempted to force his company upon her; but Krooge had got the information by following her secretly.

On this occasion he tried hard to get into her presence, but she would not allow him to be admitted, so the best he could do was to send up his flowers, together with a little message.

His message ran as follows:

"DEAREST MISS HARLAND:—

"So sorry to learn of your accident! Sincerely hope that it is not very serious. Please accept this simple token of my love. I hope you will keep the flowers by you all the day, and whenever you look at them you will be reminded of your devoted—

"KROOGE."

It was that message that sealed the fate of the flowers as soon as they were received by the lady.

"What!" she exclaimed, "he reminded of that horrid, bald-headed creature all day! Never! Here, Ann," to the servant, "take this bouquet and do what you please with it; I give it to you."

Too bad that Krooge could not know of its fate.

"But, there was another bouquet on the way thither, and one that was destined to be more favorably received."

When Jason Garretson went on, after stopping to speak with Krooge, he set out for the house where he had left the pretty typewriter, after her accident, on the previous afternoon.

Passing a florist's on the way, the very one where Krooge had stopped, he was reminded of the bouquet he had seen Krooge place upon her desk, and with the recollection he stopped short and went in.

His selection was unlike that of Krooge. The latter had bought a big, gaudy affair, but Jason's was of a neat size and made up of flowers of the choicest kinds to be had.

When he reached the house the same woman that he had seen on the previous day came to the door, and he saw that she recognized him. He inquired in a quiet, respectful way, about the young lady who had met with the accident; was told that she would probably be out on the morrow, as the sprain was not a bad one; and leaving the bouquet with the request that it be delivered to her, came away.

"Another bouquet for you, Miss Harland," the servant announced when she carried it up.

"Another!" exclaimed Tilly; "whom is it from this time?"

"It is from the young gentleman what saved your life yesterday," was the reply. "He has just called to ask how you are."

The roses turned to a deeper red in the pretty typewriter's cheeks, and she put out her hand and received the flowers gladly.

"Thank you," she said; "I will keep this one."

As soon as the woman had gone from the

room she pressed the flowers to her lips. There was no one to see, and why not? The handsome face of her rescuer had been before her constantly, as she had seen it as it bent over her when he held her in his arms. To know that he remembered her was joy. Who could he be? Never did a bouquet receive more attention than that one did. In that one day it worked more to the favor of the cause of Jason Garretson than Krooge could have gained by a lifetime of devotion.

CHAPTER XII.

A STARTLING STATEMENT.

DURING several days nothing happened that is worthy of record.

Jason was keeping his eyes and ears open, to get all the evidence he could against the trio of rascals, and did not want to act until he had made his case against them perfect.

Now he had taken his sister into his confidence fully, and had laid all the points of the case before her. She agreed with him that it would not do to tell their father until they were doubly sure of their ground. She also vowed that she would not marry Elliston under any circumstances, now that she had learned more of his true character.

Jason had kept nothing back from her, but had told her plainly what the suspicion against Elliston was. That he believed that Elliston had looked upon Boyden as a possible rival, and had taken that way of disposing of him. He told her that Boyden was in love with her—his own love experience made him have an interest in others; and Cleanthe had finally owned that, secretly, she had more than a passing friendly regard for him.

On Jason's request she had promised not to let it become known that she had any suspicion, or that there was any secret between them. She was to let matters take their own course, and trust everything to him. On his part, he had told her about his little typewriter love, taking her fully into his confidence regarding it. Also about his having Krooge as a rival, and about Elliston's being Miss Harland's guardian. He had always had the fullest confidence in Cleanthe and she in him.

He had not seen Miss Harland since the day of the accident and his timely rescue, and was waiting patiently for his friend Harvey Brandison to fulfill his promise. He had full trust in Harvey, and knew that the invitation would soon be forthcoming.

Howell Boyden he had seen a few times, but he was keeping in the background, patiently waiting.

One afternoon, near the hour for closing, a messenger came into the store with a message for Jason.

It was from Harvey Brandison, and it was the looked-for invitation.

At the hour appointed Jason was on hand at his residence.

Harvey was on the lookout for him, and opened the door before he could ring the bell to announce his arrival.

The two young men grasped hands warmly, and when Jason had laid off his hat and overcoat Harvey led him into the parlor.

Only two persons were there, and they were the ones Jason had expected to see—Mrs. Brandison and Miss Harland.

Never in all his life had Jason seen such a vision of loveliness, he thought, as he saw embodied in the person of the pretty typewriter on this occasion. If he had thought her beautiful before, now he knew her to be surpassingly so.

He had met Mrs. Brandison several times before, and she rose immediately and welcomed him, and as soon as she had done so, presented him to Miss Harland.

At the first sight of Jason, Tilly had given a gasp, and pretty blushes suffused her face. She rose and stepped forward, though, as soon as Jason was presented, giving him her hand with graceful frankness, saying:

"I remember you as my timely rescuer, on the afternoon of my accident, Mr. Garretson. Allow me to thank you for the flowers you brought to me next morning. I had no idea that I should meet you here."

Jason was charmed. If he had had any secret dread that she would prove to be uneducated or unrefined, when met socially, the doubt was laid at rest instantly. No lady he had ever met could have acted or spoken with more charming grace and becoming dignity, or with more kindness and unreserve.

He had already spoken, expressing his pleasure, etc., at meeting her. Now he returned her more cordial greeting and her recognition.

"I am glad to know that you have not forgot-

ten me, Miss Harland," he responded. "If it was a pleasure to be of service to you on the occasion of which you speak, it is a pleasure tenfold to meet you again, here in the home of mutual friends, and to be permitted to make your acquaintance."

Mr. and Mrs. Brandison looked on and listened with approving smiles.

A charming hour followed, and when at last Miss Harland spoke of going, it was quickly arranged that Jason should escort her home.

Jason grasped the hand of his friend with a hearty pressure, when he left the house, thus thanking him silently for the great service he had rendered him, and with a final "good-night" went away with the pretty typewriter leaning upon his arm.

"Shall we ride?" he asked at starting.

"I much prefer to walk," was the response.

"The distance is short."

"But your injured foot—is it strong enough?"

"Oh, yes, indeed! I have walked between my boarding-place and the office several times since my accident. I am fond of walking."

That trivial point settled, they set out, Jason holding her arm with more fond firmness than he was perhaps aware of.

All of their conversation need not be quoted, but some of it is essential to the interest of our story.

"I understand that you are the ward of Mr. Louis Elliston, Miss Harland," Jason observed once when there was a slight break in their talk.

"Yes, sir, I am," she affirmed.

"I know him well," said Jason. "He is my father's partner in business."

Jason was no promoter of "self."

"And your partner, too," the young lady quickly made correction. "I believe I am not mistaken."

"Well, I am in the firm, I suppose," Jason passed over. "But I was on the point of making another inquiry, if you will pardon me for my presumption, and I assure you that I do not ask out of idle curiosity."

"What is the inquiry?" the lady asked.

"Your father was Mr. Sandford Harland, I believe."

Jason had been making inquiries already. He had learned that much, and more. He had found out that Mr. Harland had been a merchant, though not a prominent one, and that he had been supposed to have considerable wealth at the time of his death. There was one point he wanted to gain, however, and that was—the name and address of the lawyer who had figured in the settling-up of the estate.

"That was his name, Mr. Garretson," the young lady responded.

"Then the inquiry I would make is this: Can you give me the name and address of the lawyer who figured with Mr. Elliston in settling his business affairs, after you became the ward of Louis Elliston?"

"It was a Mr. Vulteur, and his office was on — street. I have forgotten the number."

"That is near enough. I can find him. I am greatly obliged to you, and I hope that you will not think that it is mere curiosity that prompts the question."

"Oh, no, certainly not."

Jason immediately changed the subject, and in a little time they reached the pretty typewriter's destination.

Never, to either of them, had the same distance seemed so wonderfully short.

"Will you permit me to bring my sister and call on you some evening at an early date?" Jason asked, as they stood for a moment at the steps.

"Perhaps she would not desire to be acquainted with me," was the response. "I am sure she would not, if she is like Miss Elliston."

"Thank goodness she is not like her!" Jason exclaimed. "They are as unlike as daylight and darkness."

"I am glad to hear you say that. Yes, you may come, certainly; only let me know when to expect you."

After a few more words they parted, and pausing until he had seen her safe into the house, Jason turned his steps homeward.

During the next forenoon he paid a visit to the office of a prominent and reputable lawyer.

The lawyer knew him, and after first greetings had been exchanged, Jason came to the business of his call.

"What do you know of Lawyer Vulteur, of — street?" he asked.

"He is a shyster," was the immediate answer; "his nature is as bad as his odd name."

"I suspected as much. I want to engage you to make a little investigation for me, if you will undertake it."

"I will do it, for you, but I never have dealings with men of Vulteur's stamp of character and practice."

"I understand that."

"Well, Jason, what is your case?"

"It is this: About four years ago Mr. Sandford Harland died. He was a merchant, and his place of business was on — street. He left one child, a daughter, she being his only heir. Mr. Godard Elliston was appointed her guardian. Two years later he died, and his son Louis was appointed in his stead. Now it seems that Mr. Harland's property was somehow involved so that it could not be settled immediately, though it was thought that the daughter would get quite a snug fortune out of it after it was settled. It came out, however, that she got nothing whatever. Now, I want you to take a look into this matter, and see if it is altogether healthy and sound."

"I will do so, and that with pleasure. I cannot see how it came to be in the hands of such a fellow as Vulteur. If I find that he has been up to any crooked work, it will be a pleasure to me to put him through the wringer. Of course you do not hold any suspicion against your business partner—Elliston?"

"Nothing that you may learn will surprise me," Jason returned, rather evasively. "Please go ahead, mention it to no one, and let me know what you learn."

"Very well, I will do so. Come in again in about a week."

The week soon passed.

Nothing of great moment in connection with the case had come to pass. Jason was allowing matters to drift along lazily, in order to let the rascals come to feel all the more secure. He had insisted upon paying Howell Boyden his regular salary all the time that he was idle, so Boyden was losing nothing by his forced idleness. Boyden had refused at first to accept it, but when Jason vowed that he would drop the case unless he did, he finally did so under that pressure. Jason and Cleanthe had been to see Miss Harland, too, in the mean time, and that was a big point gained. The two girls struck up a fond friendship immediately, and with Tilly visiting his sister, Jason saw the coast all clear for him to gain his great object.

On the day that ended the week, Jason called again at the lawyer's office.

"I am ready for you!" the lawyer exclaimed the moment he entered. "I have made a discovery."

"What is it?" Jason eagerly asked.

"Why, Mr. Harland's property was involved, as you said, but a short time after the death of Mr. Elliston, the elder, the courts awarded Miss Harland forty thousand dollars. Where the money is I don't know. It has disappeared as utterly as though the earth had opened and taken it in—as the saying runs."

Jason was not surprised at the statement, but he was at the amount named. He held a long conference with the lawyer, and when he came away his face wore an expression of grim determination.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE COILS BEGIN TO TIGHTEN.

THE days ran rapidly along.

In order to make the overthrow of Louis Elliston complete, Jason was now awaiting the movements of the lawyer whom he had engaged.

Jason had every reason, now, to believe that Louis Elliston and the lawyer, Vulteur, had robbed Tilly Harland, and if such proved to be the case he was determined that restitution should be made.

His sister Cleanthe was his confidante in everything, and she was lending him her hearty co-operation. Now she almost detested the man whom she had promised to marry, having been thrown more in his society and having a better insight into his true character, to say nothing of the startling revelations that Jason had made concerning him.

In the mean time Jason was making splendid progress in the acquaintance of the pretty typewriter. His love for her became intensified, the more he saw of her, and she could not conceal the truth that her own heart was filled with the same tender sentiment. Now he called on her occasionally, without being accompanied by his sister, and she had once or twice been to visit Cleanthe, on which occasions it was Jason's delightful duty to escort her home.

Howell Boyden's case was at a standstill, for Jason was urging him to wait until the whole chain was ready for the shackling of the rascals. Boyden's father had somehow become acquainted with the facts of the case, and he was urging Howell to do something to hasten the removal of

the stigma from his name. Under this pressure, the young man was impatient for Jason to bring matters to a head. He could not reveal the truth to his father, being under promise to Jason not to do so, though he did tell him that Jason knew he was innocent of the crime and would soon bring forward the proof.

One morning Jason had occasion to go to the Brandon-Coolidge establishment on business.

Now having come to know, as well as Gaston Krooge, how fond Miss Harland was of flowers, he stopped on his way and provided himself with a small bouquet for her desk.

It happened that Krooge was just returning to that store, after a ten days' sojourn in another establishment with which he was connected, and he similarly armed himself.

He reached the store a little before Jason did, and with his customary show of politeness presented his bouquet to the pretty typewriter, putting it in the vase as we have seen him do before and placing it on her desk.

She received him coldly enough, though she had not seen him for several days, and did not allow him even to interrupt her work.

Harvey Brandon was looking on, smiling, and his smile became even broader when, just after Krooge had turned away from the young lady's desk, Jason Garretson entered the door, he, too, bearing a bouquet.

Jason nodded to Krooge, who was the first person he met; stopped and shook hands with Harvey, and then passed on to the inclosure where his lady-love was sitting, her dainty fingers plying nimbly over the keys of her writing-machine as usual.

Tilly glanced up at his approach, and seeing who it was, rose, smiling, and gave him her hand.

Harvey Brandon was looking to see how Krooge would take it.

Krooge was seen to bite his lip, his eyes opened to their widest, and he took a step forward as though he would throw Jason out of the establishment, neck and heels.

Jason passed a few remarks with the pretty typewriter, presented the flowers he had brought, and with a bow turned away.

Krooge looked to see what she would do with the bouquet. Would it supplant his in the little vase? In a moment the green-eyed monster raved in his breast. He saw the bouquet he had brought taken from the vase and laid on a shelf over the desk, that the one Jason had presented might occupy its place. The exchange made, the pretty girl went on with her writing as though nothing had happened. She had not given Krooge the additional distress of a glance in his direction, as she had been strongly tempted to do.

Krooge was very red, he shut his teeth hard, and there was a look of wicked hatred in his eyes.

Jason talked a little while with Harvey, performed the business that had brought him there, and went away.

Later in the day Jason happened to see a messenger deliver a note to Ellidson. Business was brisk at the time, and Ellidson was displaying goods to some rich country merchants, men who had dealt with the house for years. Ellidson opened the note and gave a glance at its contents, and dropping it on the counter went on with the business in hand.

Pretty soon they moved off to another part of the store, and Jason forgot all about the incident until some time later when, on passing around that way, he found the note still lying where Ellidson had dropped it.

The sheet was out of the envelope, partly unfolded, and Jason saw the signature. It was "Gaston Krooge."

The curiosity of the young man was aroused at once. He detested himself at the thought of reading the note, but after a little reflection he decided to do so. He considered the rascals he had to deal with, and felt that the end in view would justify the means used to gain it.

Ellidson was out of the room at the time and spreading out the sheet he read as follows:

"LOUIS ELLIDSON:—I must see you to-night at the Hotel. I mean to hold you to your bargain. Meet me at eight o'clock. Important."

"GASTON KROOGE."

Jason coolly folded the note and put it into his pocket. He felt that this was a bit of written evidence not to be lost.

Later on he saw Ellidson looking around for it, asking the clerks if they had seen it, but he kept away from him and was not questioned. It is not likely that he would have been, anyhow.

At eight o'clock that night Jason was at the hotel, clad in his big ulster overcoat, with his

fur cap pulled well down on his head and his blue glasses over his eyes.

Gaston Krooge was there, walking up and down the corridor with impatient strides.

In about half an hour Louis Ellidson came in. Jason had already taken a seat in the reading-room. He had seen Ellidson at that place frequently, and knew that he nearly always occupied the same seat, when it was vacant. Jason was taking care that it should be found vacant now. He had laid his cane across it.

He could see the corridor, the partition being of glass, and saw Ellidson on the moment of his arrival. He saw Krooge advanced and speak to him. There was no shake of the hands, but they came immediately toward the reading-room.

As they entered the door, Jason reached over for another paper, on the table behind him, and in sitting down again he remove his cane from the arms of the seat he had thus been holding.

He did not look at the two men, but gave his attention to the paper.

To his immense satisfaction Ellidson led the way to that very seat, and he and Krooge there sat down.

"I thought you wasn't coming," Krooge observed. "I knew you'd got my note, though, for I told the boy to be sure and give it to you personally and come back and let me know. You see I didn't take any chances of its falling into other hands."

"That's all right," growled Ellidson, with a wave of dismissal; "I am here, and now what do you want to see me for? I can tell you that I didn't like the tone of your note."

"Perhaps it was a little brash," Krooge owned, "but I felt worse than I wrote, a mighty sight."

"Well, well, what is it you want? My time isn't at your command, Krooge."

"You needn't be so huffy and airish with me, Lou Ellidson. I hold a trump hand against you, and you know it. What I want to see you for is to see if you mean to stick to your part of our bargain."

"Why, yes, of course; what is wrong?"

"Well, that handsome ward of yours. You promised me that she should marry me, if I would do certain work for you. I did my part and now I want you to do yours. If you don't—"

"There, there, now, keep cool. Didn't I introduce you to her? Didn't I say a word in your favor? Didn't I open up the field for you? What more do you want? You can't expect me to go and court her for you, can you?"

"Well—er, no, not that; but I want you to use your authority over her. She ain't out of your hands yet, and you can make her marry me."

"I don't know about that. Besides, that is going further than I ever agreed to go. I agreed to use my influence in your behalf, but nothing more."

"Well, you ain't doing that very fast. The trouble is, there is a rival in the field, and you could never guess who it is."

"Great Scott! do you want me to accompany the girl around, armed with a gun, to keep lovers away? As to guessing who this rival of yours is, I don't intend to try."

Jason was taking it all in, both interested and amused. They were speaking in low tones, but Jason's ears were sharp and he was close behind them. They never gave him a thought, evidently taking him for some old codger, if they thought of him that much.

"The rival," announced Krooge, "is nobody else than Jason Garretson."

"The deuce you say!"

The exclamation was one of genuine surprise. If Jason could have seen Ellidson's face then, he would have seen it clouded.

"That is exactly what I do say," declared Krooge, "and now the question is, how am I to throw him off the track?"

"If your rival is Jason Garretson," Ellidson answered, "and if he means business, your case is about hopeless, Krooge."

"By heavens! she shall marry me!" Krooge exclaimed, bringing his fist down on the table.

"Well, I hope you can win her, that is all," said Ellidson. "I will do all I can for you, and I can do no more. I can't force her; that is out of the question."

"You shall force her!" hissed Krooge. "If you don't, then I'll put Howell Boyden back—"

"Sh!" Ellidson cautioned; "have a care how you talk. You gave me your word, under oath, that you would never betray the confidence—"

"I know all about that, and I don't mean to do so if you do your part. You must help me win that girl, just as you promised."

"Well, I'll do what I can for you. Perhaps after all I can get hold of some plan to set the matter right for you. I will meet you here a week from to-night, and perhaps I will have something to tell you. In the mean time keep your head level and make the girl feel how truly devoted you are to her."

"Well," agreed Krooge, "I'll give you the week, but you must understand that I want you to do something."

After a little more talk in the same strain they parted, and Jason Garretson felt like shaking hands with himself. Now he had hold of just what he had been wanting.

CHAPTER XIV.

CAPTURE AND RESCUE.

DURING the next forenoon Jason received a note from Howell Boyden.

It was dated a day earlier, and had been posted on the previous night.

It was as follows:

"MR. JASON GARRETSON:—

"FRIEND JASON:—Do not take any action in the matter until you hear further from me. I believe I have discovered something. It will be of interest to you. Positively, do not act until you know all."

"Truly,

"HOWELL."

Jason was puzzled. What could it be that Boyden had learned. He was anxious to know all about it, but of course would have to wait, which he proceeded to do with all patience.

When several days had passed, though, and nothing further was heard from him, Jason went around to see Boyden.

To his surprise he had not been seen in nearly a week, and his parents were growing anxious about him. He had left the house one evening; it proved to be the same evening on which he had posted the note to Jason, and in going out had remarked:

"Don't be anxious about me, mother; I shall turn up again, like a bad penny."

His mother had thought nothing of his words at the time, further than that she supposed he meant that he would not be in early.

Now the matter began to look serious.

"I was just going out to notify the police about the case," old Mr. Boyden said to Jason, as the latter was taking his leave.

"I will accompany you," Jason offered.

They set out together, and laid the case before the chief of police.

When that official had heard their story, he stroked his beard in a thoughtful manner.

"We must lay all sentiment aside, in dealing with such matters," he remarked. "I must call your attention to the looks of this thing. It looks as if the young man were really guilty of the charge that has been made against him, and had taken himself off purposely."

Old Mr. Boyden raved like a madman.

When Jason had succeeded in calming him, to a degree, he showed the note that Howell had sent to him on that last night. Further, he assured the officer that Boyden was positively innocent of the crime.

"The best thing that you can do, then," advised the officer, "is to tell what you know and clear the matter up."

Jason pointed to the words in the letter—"Positively, do not act until you know all."

"You see," he said, "my hands are tied."

The interview resulted in little, but the chief promised that he would have a thorough search made for the missing man.

Time passed on, and ere it seemed possible, a month had elapsed.

The missing man had not been found, and nothing could be learned of him. He was as completely gone as though he had been banished to some other sphere.

Jason Garretson still refused to disclose what he knew, so that it could become public, though he did take the chief of police partly into his confidence, in order that he might have some definite clues to work upon.

At last, after about six weeks of absence, Howell Boyden was found. Rather, at the end of that time he returned home. He was thin, pale, weak—in short, he had just been discharged from a hospital in a neighboring city.

His story was plain and simple. He had gone to that city, had fallen into bad hands, and had been found in the street with a nearly fractured skull. As it happened, there was nothing on his person to show who he was, and as he had only very recently recovered, he could not give the information sooner.

To Jason Garretson he told the story more at length. He had entered upon a little detective work on his account, and had followed Louis Ellidson to that city. He had made an impor-

tant discovery. When he was returning to the depot, after learning all he could, he was suddenly set upon from behind by some unknown person. That was the last he knew until he came to in the hospital, only three days before his return home.

What his discovery was need not be told now. It will be shown in the grand denouement to which we are now approaching.

Armed with this new evidence, though, Jason had the case well in hand.

Everything settled down to peace and quiet, now that the missing man was found, and his father's mind set at rest concerning his innocence. In order to do this, the old gentleman had to be taken into the secret, which was done after Jason had held a consultation with Cleanthe.

Jason and Cleanthe had a thorough understanding, and now that the perfidy of Louis Ellisdon was clearly established, she willingly lent herself to the task of making his overthrow the more startling and the crisis the more dramatic.

Ellisdon had been pleading to have the day for the wedding set, and finally Cleanthe named the date. To the surprise of all it was earlier than any one had looked for. It gave the impatient but happy lover only one month more of probation. As the event had to come off anyhow, Cleanthe explained, a few weeks one way or the other made little difference; and as Mr. Ellisdon was so anxious—etc.

It was a highly satisfactory arrangement all around.

Mr. Garretson complimented his daughter again and again, and never tired of sounding the praises of his prospective son-in-law.

Jason was not idle now. The whole affair turned upon him. He was the chief mover in the play, and its success depended upon the thoroughness with which he did his work.

He took up the clew that had been furnished by Boyden, and found that it was as Boyden had reported. In Jason's mind there was no doubt as to the person who had made the assault upon him. He believed it to have been Ellisdon.

In the mean time Detective Krooge had been progressing backward finely in his love affair. The pretty typewriter had forbid his speaking to her.

Krooge had had another meeting with Ellisdon, but it did not work anything to his interest. If anything, it was the other way.

Ellisdon had had time to consider the matter fully, and he saw that he had nothing to fear from Krooge. The wily detective could say nothing without implicating himself, and it was not likely that he would do that.

All the satisfaction he got out of Ellisdon was that he, Ellisdon, had again mentioned his name to Miss Harland, but had been met with such utter scorn that he would not for money venture to speak to her again on the subject.

In this state of affairs Krooge had to fall back upon his own resources.

But, there was another person interested in the affair. This was Miss Ellisdon. Through her brother she had learned about the interest that Jason was taking in the pretty typewriter, and the spirit of jealousy it aroused in her was even bigger and more monstrous, if possible, than it was in Krooge.

She knew Krooge, he having been at the house more than once to see Louis, and she knew him for just what he was.

She sent for him.

When he presented himself, she came right to business with him and laid her little scheme out before him for his approval.

"Krooge," she said, "you love Tilly Harland. My brother is anxious that you should marry her. I want to help you to that end. With such a person as Mr. Garretson against you, your case is hopeless. You must force her to marry you. To-morrow I will send for her to come here and see me in the evening. She will come. When she leaves here to return home, you must capture her. Have your minister all ready, and marry her before she knows what has happened."

Krooge fell into the spirit of the thing instantly. In fact, he had been for two weeks trying to get hold of some such scheme. He agreed, and the whole vile affair was soon arranged.

Miss Ellisdon's purpose is plainly seen. With Tilly Harland out of the way, she might yet be able to win the love of Jason.

But, as it frequently happens, they reckoned without their host.

Hermione sent a note to Tilly, as agreed, but it happened that on that evening Tilly had promised to call on Cleanthe Garretson. As the

note hinted that it was important that she should obey its summons, however, and wondering what it could be that Hermione wanted to see her for, Tilly decided to go.

Accordingly, she excused herself to Cleanthe, and sent a note to Jason telling him where she was going.

Knowing what he did, Jason's suspicions were immediately aroused, and he resolved that, unknown to her, he would follow Tilly to protect her against possible danger and evil design.

When the pretty typewriter left her boarding-house he was not far away, and in disguise in his unique make-up.

He followed her until he saw her enter the Ellisdon residence.

She was in the house about half an hour, reappearing at the end of that time and turning her footsteps toward home.

Jason was strongly tempted to join her, but reflecting that he was not in his own proper person, so far as appearance went, he did not do so. He followed on after her, though, at some distance.

When the young lady was about half-way home, and when she was passing through a semi-deserted street, a thing happened that made Jason's blood boil in an instant. He saw her suddenly set upon by two men, and in almost no time she was thrust into a waiting cab, which started off immediately.

Jason started to run with all his might. And he was no slow runner. Down through the middle of the street he ran, putting forth every effort. And his running was not in vain. He gained upon the cab, and finally came up behind it.

He had not shouted, knowing that to do so would be to make the driver of the cab whip up his horse, when his chance of overtaking it would be slim.

Having come up with the vehicle, he caught hold behind and rested for a moment, and then he let go and ran around to the horse's head.

Laying hold upon the bit, he jerked the animal back upon its haunches with a show of strength that seemed almost superhuman. The cab was brought to a stop in short order.

"If you go on before I tell you to," Jason cried sternly, pulling a pistol from his pocket, "I will shoot you dead!"

The driver had the pluck taken right out of him, and dropped the lines. In another instant Jason had flung open the door of the cab.

"Allow that lady to alight instantly," he ordered, "or it will be the worse for you. I am an officer. I saw your work."

Krooge, for it was he, as Jason recognized in spite of a disguise, made an attempt to parley, but Jason laid hold of his collar and jerked him out of the vehicle and sent him sprawling upon the hard pavement.

Being released, the young lady sprang out instantly, crying:

"Save me! oh! save me!"

Jason caught her, ran with her away from the scene, telling her who he was as they ran, and in a little time she was safe at home, twice rescued by the man she now loved.

CHAPTER XV.

THE MASK TORN AWAY.

It was on a Saturday night that the adventure happened.

Typewriter Tilly was never seen at her post in the store again.

On the following day, Sunday, Jason Garretson asked her the momentous question, and she gave him the answer he desired.

He had made her acquainted with the whole rascally scheme, and had impressed upon her mind the constant danger that threatened her at the hands of Krooge. That, however, needed no painting, after the narrow escape she had just experienced.

Through his sister, Jason endeavored to provide her liberally with money, but the spirited girl utterly refused to accept a penny. She had saved some, she declared, enough for all her needs, and preferred to be independent.

Failing in that direction, Jason tried another ruse, and some days later the pretty typewriter received a letter from the law office of Jason's lawyer, inclosing a thousand dollars, which, the lawyer assured her, was due her from some of her father's still unsettled affairs.

Tilly went to see the lawyer, but got no additional satisfaction, except a hint that perhaps the future would bring more to light.

The lawyer, by the way, had thoroughly sifted the case that Jason had put into his hands, and had discovered that Louis Ellisdon, with the help of his Vulteur, had coolly and deliberately robbed Tilly Harland of her fortune.

But, the day of retribution was now near at hand.

The month was nearing an end, and great preparations were being made for the Ellisdon-Garretson wedding.

It was an occasion on which Mr. Garretson meant to do himself proud. No expense was to be spared. It was to be one of the events of the year in the social circle of the "four hundred."

Not a word had been breathed to Mr. Garretson concerning the discoveries his son Jason had made. It was known that he would demand proof positive at the first hint, and it was thought best to give him the truth and the proof together, all in a lump.

In the mean time no attention had been paid to Krooge by Jason. He was utterly ignored, and might as well have been dead, so far as any hope of ever winning the pretty typewriter was concerned.

But Krooge was not dead, though he would have been a good deal less harmful in that state.

He had seen Jason several times since the night of the abducting affair, but as nothing had been hinted to lead him to think otherwise, he believed that his identity had not been discovered. Of course he had no idea that it was Jason who had come to the rescue of his victim, but he thought that perhaps the girl had recognized him. In that event, of course Jason would be sure to know of it.

Quite late one night, about a week before the time set for the wedding, Jason received a note purporting to be from Harvey Brandison, requesting him to come immediately to his house.

Jason was suspicious, but decided to go. He armed himself well and set out. He had a revolver in pocket and a heavy cane in hand.

When he had gone about two-thirds of the distance, and was in a rather lonely spot, he saw two men coming toward him from the opposite direction. He went right on, but when the men came near he turned out to give them plenty of room. As he did so he noticed that they turned in the same direction, and he gripped his cane and slipped the revolver from his pocket. That instant they made a spring at him.

Jason jumped back, whirled his cane around, and one of the fellows was sent to the ground without delay. The other, too, got a sound whack, and immediately found himself peering into the tube of the glistening revolver.

This one was Gaston Krooge, though he was well disguised and Jason was not quite sure of his identity.

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" Jason asked.

"I guess we've made a mistake," Krooge answered, in a strange voice.

"Yes, I guess you have," agreed Jason, "and now you had better amble off, or I will call a policeman and turn you over to him."

The other fellow scrambled to his feet, and being allowed to do so, they lost no time in getting away.

Jason returned home, knowing now that the note had been a decoy.

It was Krooge's last effort, though he might have made others had he been allowed time and opportunity.

The day of the wedding came, and late on that afternoon Gaston Krooge and Simon Gifford were arrested. Neither knew until later that the other had met the same fate, and the news of their arrest was not allowed to reach the ears of Ellisdon.

They were kept apart, and were questioned. Krooge was sharp, to a certain degree, and was careful not to commit himself too far, but it was different with Gifford. He had little backbone, and soon broke down and confessed the whole rascally scheme.

As the hour for the wedding came on, the Garretson Mansion roused up and became a blaze of light and splendor.

Carriages arrived and invited guests poured in, everybody was delighted, and Moses Garretson was proud and happy.

The four great parlors were rich with flowers, and by and by strains of sweetest music lent enchantment to the fairy-land dream.

Two of the parlors, those on the right of the main hall, had been arranged for dancing. On the left of the hall, the front room, the largest of the four, was to be the scene of the ceremony. The room in the rear of that was set for the supper that was to follow.

Between these two rooms were folding-doors, now closed. The guests were assembling in the front room, seats being arranged at the front end and on the sides, and near the folding-doors hung a great bell of flowers under which the happy (!) couple were to stand.

By and by a clergyman arrived and was es-

corted to his place near these doors, and soon everything was in readiness for the great event to come off.

Mr. and Mrs. Garretson, Miss Ellisdon, and some others of the immediate relatives of the bride and groom, came in and took the places reserved for them, and then followed a moment of silent suspense.

Jason Garretson was absent from the room, but no one thought anything of it, unless perhaps his father and mother and Miss Ellisdon. The others, those who noticed his absence, thought that perhaps he would act as best man.

Presently the music struck up, not music of the blare of trumpets and clash of cymbals sort, but in a far-away-sounding strain of softest and most entrancing tone, and in a few moments the bride and groom, with their retinue, entered and advanced to their places.

The music died away, and the clergyman rose to his feet.

Pausing for a moment, to give weight to the solemnity of the occasion, he began the service, his rich, deep voice resounding throughout the rooms grandly.

It should have been mentioned before that Tilly Harland, the pretty typewriter, was one of the bridesmaids. She was handsomely and becomingly attired, and it would have been hard to decide which was the prettier, the bride or she.

The clergyman proceeded, and soon came to the words—"Therefore, if any can show just cause why they may not lawfully be joined together, let him now speak, or else hereafter forever hold his peace."

There was a solemn pause.

Suddenly the folding-doors were run back, disclosing the supper-room to the assembled guests, and Jason Garretson stepped forward with uplifted hand.

"Hold!" he ordered; "*I forbid this marriage!*"

His handsome face was slightly flushed with the excitement of the moment, but he was perfectly cool. Right at his back stood two policemen.

Had a cannon-ball crashed suddenly into the room it could not have created a greater stir of excitement. It was a striking momentary tableau. The clergyman recoiled a step, his eyes staring with amazement; Mr. and Mrs. Garretson half-sprung to their feet, their faces pale and excited; Louis Ellisdon half-turned toward the doors, his face as ghastly as death and his eyes filled with an expression of terror.

The tableau was immediately broken by Jason, who said:

"Officers, arrest that man!" pointing to Ellisdon.

"What means this outrage?" Ellisdon asked.

"It means that you are our prisoner, sir," answered one of the officers, as they both laid hands upon him; and in an instant handcuffs were upon his wrists.

Then for a few minutes confusion reigned supreme. Jason tried to make himself heard, or rather tried to bring everybody to silence, but failed. His father was in a heat of passion, and only for some friends holding him, would probably have throttled his son there and then.

The clergyman, a large, imposing man, stepped forward and raised both his arms. This had the desired effect, and the room became gradually silent.

"We must have an explanation," he said. "This young man must state his reason for forbidding this marriage. Let us give him our attention. Upon what grounds, sir," turning to Jason, "do you forbid this union?"

"Upon the ground, first," responded Jason, in a clear, ringing voice, "that Louis Ellisdon is a married man!"

"It is a black—a damnable lie!" shouted Ellisdon, fiercely.

"It is the truth!"

The speaker was a little, pale-faced woman, who now stepped out of the rear room, a babe in her arms and another child holding her hand.

Ellisdon's face was a picture of dismay, and he was speechless. Mr. Garretson was about in the same condition. The rest of the company were wrought to the very highest pitch of excitement.

"It is the truth," the little woman repeated impressively; "you are my husband, and these are your children."

Ellisdon soon found his tongue.

"It is false!" he cried. "I never saw you before in my life, woman! This is an infernal piece of blackmail."

Jason motioned to others who were seated in the supper-room, and several men and women came forward, before whose presence Ellisdon utterly quailed.

"Is this woman's story true or false?" Jason asked them.

"It is true," every one of the witnesses answered; "he is her husband. We know him positively, but under another name."

"It is false, false!" Ellisdon still insisted.

Jason motioned to another person in the rear room, and his lawyer came forth. His name was Hardwick, and he was known to most of those present personally, and to all by reputation. He was especially well known to Mr. Garretson, whom he had served for years.

"Mr. Hardwick, what do you know about Louis Ellisdon?" Jason asked.

"I know that he is about the most heartless rascal who ever stood in leather!" the old lawyer answered warmly.

At this, from such a man as Hardwick, Ellisdon broke down. It was useless, as he saw, to hold out longer. He was in the toils.

"It is all up," he muttered, hanging his head. "It is all so; I own up. Let me be taken anywhere out of this room."

"We are not quite done with you yet, you scoundrel!" said Jason. "Be seated, ladies and gentlemen," he added; "I desire to unmask this cringing cur."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MARRIAGE FEAST NOT WASTED.

HERMIONE ELLISDON had already left the room.

The others now resumed their seats, and all eyes were fixed upon Jason.

Cleanthe had dropped into a chair that had been purposely placed where she would be somewhat out of sight. Ellisdon had been forced in to another, and the two policemen stood guard over him.

Jason Garretson stood in the middle of the little space under the bell of flowers, and when the room had become silent, he spoke.

"Some months ago," he began, "a young man named Boyden was dismissed in disgrace from the house of Garretson, Ellisdon & Co. We had been missing articles for a long time from the department of which he was superintendent, and had a detective on the case to find out and arrest the thief."

"One afternoon the detective announced that he had found out who the guilty person was, and named Howell Boyden, the superintendent of the department, as the man. We were astounded—at any rate my father was; I was not told of the matter until after it had been acted upon. Boyden had been in the establishment eighteen years; had always been found earnest, honest and capable; had risen from one of the lowest positions to one of the highest; and that he could be guilty of petty stealing seemed incredible. I refused to entertain belief in his guilt for even a moment."

"The proof, however, was of the strongest kind. The detective said that he had seen him take certain articles and put them into a pocket of his overcoat, and on searching him the articles were found upon his person."

"Boyden persisted in declaring that he was innocent, but in the face of the proof his word was not taken. Considering that he had been so long in the house, however, he was not arrested, but was allowed to resign. This was on the suggestion of this man Ellisdon, and, without having much time to think it over and with the disgrace of arrest staring him in the face, Boyden resigned."

"He, Boyden, told me his story and I believed it. I had never been favorably impressed with Ellisdon, and, although he was a partner in the firm, I suspected him of having had something to do with Boyden's fall. I began to watch him, and also to look after the detective. Without going over all that at length, telling how, when, where, and so forth, I will give a resume of what I learned."

"On the morning after the arrest and removal of Boyden, Ellisdon gave the detective his personal check for a thousand dollars. Afterward the detective paid a hundred dollars to one Simon Gifford. This person was an employee in the firm, under Mr. Boyden, and on the recommendation of Ellisdon he was promoted to the vacant place. These facts all went to confirm my suspicion against Ellisdon. But I still wanted to find out his motive, if he were indeed at the bottom of it."

Jason made a momentary pause.

He had the attention of all now, and the room was as still as a vault.

Louis Ellisdon was looking at him with startled interest. It was a revelation that he had not dreamed of. That Jason had been following him like a haunting Nemesis, seemed altogether incredible.

"That motive I learned," Jason went on. "Louis Ellisdon looked upon Howell Boyden as a rival for the hand of my sister. He was making little progress in his suit for her hand at that time, and so resolved to remove Boyden from his path. He hired Detective Krooge to do his dirty work for him. He promised Krooge a thousand dollars for his help, with the additional promise that he would lend his influence to bring about a marriage between his, Ellisdon's, ward, and him, Krooge."

"Krooge, in turn, made a bargain with Gifford, promising him a hundred dollars in money and the vacant place as soon as Boyden was ousted. Gifford accepted the terms. It was he who put the stolen articles into Boyden's coat pocket. Krooge's evidence of course was as black a lie as ever was spoken. It was Gifford who had been stealing all along, and he has confessed. Both Krooge and Gifford have been arrested and are now locked up."

"Howell Boyden, too, began a little detective work, and the result was that he learned that Ellisdon was leading a double life. He found that he had a wife and children. He tracked him to the place where he was living under the name of Donellis, and secured proof positive. Ellisdon suspected him, and attacked him, with murderous intent, and for several weeks Boyden lay in a hospital with an almost fractured skull."

"This woman is Ellisdon's lawful wife, and these are his children. He courted and married her five years ago, under the name of Donellis. He believed that she was about to inherit a fortune. She never suspected that the name of Donellis was not his true name until I revealed the truth to her. She thought he was a traveling salesman, which accounted for the little time he was at home with her."

"There is more to tell. While I was tracking Ellisdon, getting this evidence together against him, I became acquainted with his ward, Miss Harland. She was employed as a typewriter, thus earning her daily bread, while he was enjoying himself upon forty thousand dollars of which he had robbed her. I got an inkling of this, or a suspicion of it, if you please, and put the matter into the hands of Mr. Hardwick for investigation. Mr. Hardwick has brought the truth to light, and Louis Ellisdon has got to make good that sum to the young lady he has so mercilessly robbed."

"Need I say more? Is there not good and sufficient reason why this wedding should not go on? Mind you, what I have said is nothing of suspicion now; every point has been proven, and the confession of Simon Gifford supports that part of the story in addition to my proofs."

Jason stopped, and seeing that he had no more to say, his father exclaimed:

"Can this be true? Louis Ellisdon, I would not have thought it of you. Why did you wait until this late day, Jason, before you made these things known?"

"Because I knew that it would be hard to convince you of the truth," the young man answered. "I thought it best to make the charge and show up the proofs all at once. Besides, the consummate scoundrel deserved just such an exposure as this has been."

"True, true. Where is Howell Boyden? Is he here? I must offer him an humble apology."

Boyden was not there. Knowing the nature of the revelation, as he did, he had refused to take any part in it. His absence won him favor in the eyes of all.

Lawyer Hardwick next spoke, telling at length the story of Ellisdon's robbing of the orphan, and when he had done he ordered the officers to take their prisoner away.

When the crestfallen villain was gone, the company seemed to draw a breath of relief. They could hardly believe that they were awake, and that what they had witnessed was real.

Tilly Harland was about as surprised as any one present. To find that she was actually in possession of such a sum as had been named, seemed impossible.

Cleanthe slipped out of the room, unobserved, and laid off her wedding attire. She felt that she had done a right thing. Considering the designs the rascal had with regard to her, she felt no condemnation for the part she had played.

About the time that she reappeared the clergyman rose to go. Up to this time that gentleman had been held spellbound in his chair, and was about as good as "knocked out" by the thrilling revelations that had been made. He was about making his excuse, when Jason interrupted him.

"I think we can make use of your service yet, my dear sir," he observed, and turning to the company, he said in a louder tone:

"Friends, if there is any part of this matter that might cause me regret, it would be to see you leave here disappointed. To disappoint that wretch as I did was right; but, to let the affair go on to this last hour, when you too must be made sharers in the disappointment, is wrong. You have been invited to a marriage, and a marriage feast. The latter is ready and waiting, and it only remains for me to provide the former."

All eyes were wide open with wonder, and all were turned upon him, so no one noticed that Cleanthe was talking earnestly to Tilly Harland.

This was a part of the programme that had been kept secret from her. Jason had feared that, if she knew of his design, she might refuse to be present. As it was she was in the trap, and there did not seem any means of escape. Cleanthe was urging her not to think of such a thing as refusal.

"Father, mother, friends," Jason went on, "my affianced bride is in this room in the person of Miss Harland, and if she will marry me here and now, the anticipated pleasures of the evening need not be interrupted further."

It was an evening of surprises, truly.

Pretty Tilly Harland finally gave her consent, under pressure, and blushing took her place under the bell of flowers by the side of her handsome lover.

Cleanthe had changed places with her, and now she held the post of bridemaid instead of that of bride.

This time no one could offer any reason why they should not be wed, and the ceremony went on to completion.

It was a glorious occasion, and everybody was happy.

Mr. Garretson had never felt so proud of his son in his life. Now that the scales had dropped from his eyes, and the mask had been snatched from Ellisdson's face, he saw him in a new light, and could only wonder how he had ever been so blind.

He took his new daughter to his arms with all heartiness, as did also Mrs. Garretson, and Tilly was made to feel that she was an orphan no longer.

The marriage feast was not wasted; the wedding march was not unheard; the music did not lack for merry feet to keep it time; the guests did not go away disappointed. It was a grand and glorious occasion, and one to be remembered.

Our task is done, and a pleasurable one it has been; so we say, with an author's pardonable regret, the little more that remains to be said, before "the end" is written.

Louis Ellisdson and his Vulture met with their just deserts at the hands of the law, and so did Gaston Krooge and Simon Gifford.

The lawful wife of Ellisdson was provided for out of his property, of which the scamp fortunately had sufficient to meet all demands against it. She adopted his right name, but secured a divorce from him soon as he had been sentenced to prison.

Lawyer Hardwick succeeded in recovering the money that had been taken from Tilly Harland, and it was restored to her.

Howell Boyden was reinstated, but he did not long remain in that position. A change was made in the firm, and he became its junior partner.

A year later there was another wedding, when he and Cleanthe Garretson were made one.

The burden of the business now rests upon Jason and Howell.

Hermione Ellisdson could not stand the disgrace that had been brought upon the family name, though at heart she was no better than her brother, so she went abroad, where she finally married, but, after one year of her companionship her husband fled to the mystic, but probably more peaceful, land of "Parts Unknown."

Jason Garretson was highly complimented by professional detectives upon the way in which he had handled the case, and he knew that they meant what they said, as they were men not given to flattery. He felt proud of the achievement, though of course he had little to say about it.

On one corner of the desk, in the private office at the store, stands a typewriter that is covered with a glass case. That case is locked, and the key has been thrown away. It is the machine that was so long used by the pretty girl who became his wife, and whose fingers were flashing so lightly and fairy-like over its keys when he saw her for the first time. It will remain there while Jason Garretson lives.

THE END.

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